

MEETINGS WITH SAGES AND SAINTS

(Lighthouses Guiding Seeker's Journey Within)



V. Ganesan

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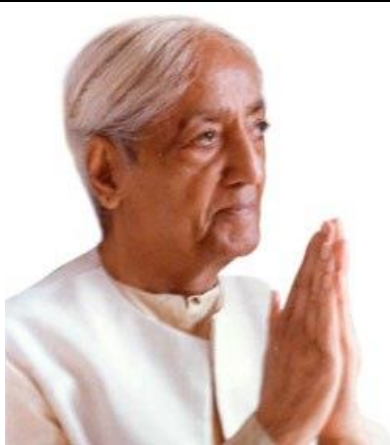
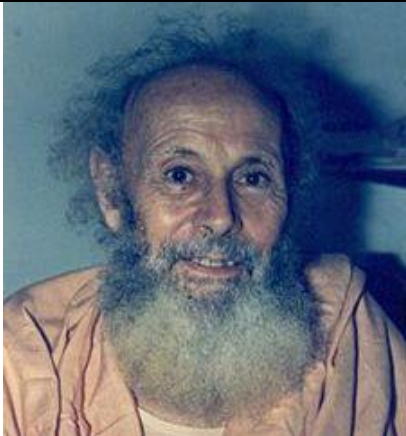
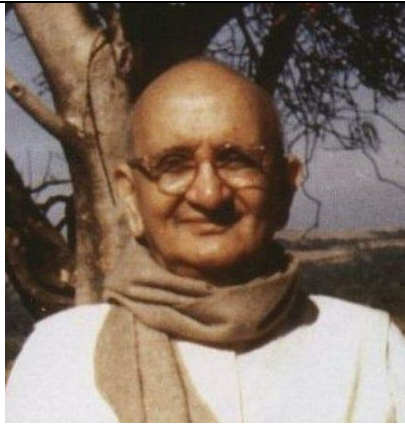
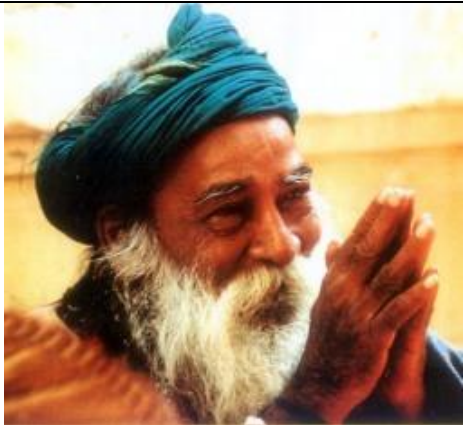
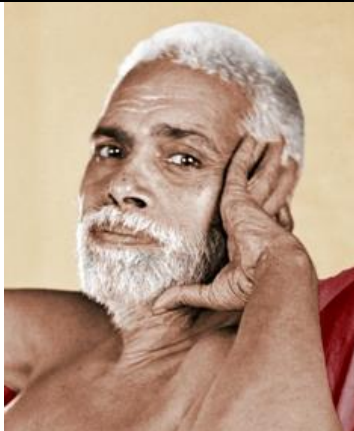
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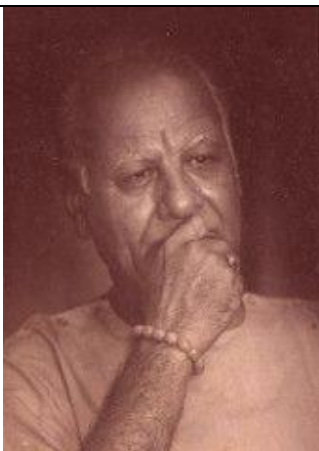
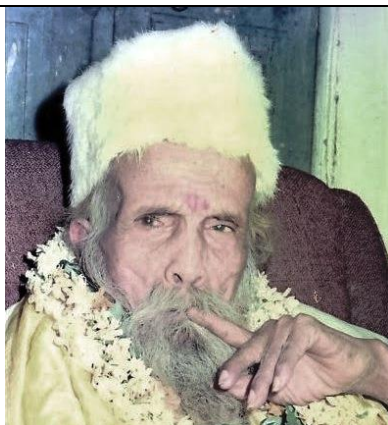
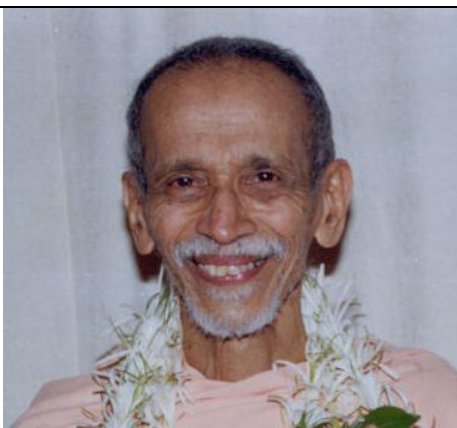
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Dedication



**Prostrations to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi,
Who has come in so many forms to bless us all.**





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EDITOR'S NOTE



“Be a channel for the ‘White Light’ to pass through” is a powerful commandment in the *Vedas*. In this sacred statement both *Jnana* and *Bhakti* are equally imbedded – the ‘*White Light*’ is pure Wisdom, or *Jnana*. The seeker becoming a channel for it to pass through, is the highest expression of surrender, or *Bhakti*!

A seeker’s life begins with simple surrender, matures with conscious surrender, and ends with full surrender at the sacred feet of the Master. For such a surrendered *sadhaka*, God extends unfailing guidance - through the Scriptures, the *Guru* and one’s own ‘Inner Voice’. One of them, or combination of them, will rush to one who has become a channel for the ‘*White Light*’ to pass through.

The first step towards this goal, is to read the life of Saints. The second step is getting acquainted with their teachings. The most important third step of receiving guidance from them, then follows automatically – guidance that changes the course of the seeker’s spiritual journey at critical periods.

Mere logical understanding and systematic explanations of spiritual theories help very little in a seeker’s journey. On the other hand, when a true seeker shares the many aspects of the Truth he longs and lives for, it gives great clarity to his fellow seekers. In this light, the following sharing of Ganesan’s meetings with *Mahatmas* -- Sages and Saints -- is a sure help for the reader to steady oneself and progress on the spiritual path.

This book could not have been started or completed without the powerful inspiration and guidance of ‘*Mouna*’ Swami of Velpur. Also, given his advanced age, Ganesan could not have ventured to accomplish it without the active support of his closest friend, philosopher, guide Anuradha. Half the content that has been presented - Ganesan’s reminiscences of his meetings with the various *Mahatmas* was possible only because of her extraordinary memory. And, thanks to her son -- Dr. Sankar J. Kausik, a practising Surgeon in America -- a mature spiritual aspirant. He has had the opportunity and privilege of moving very closely with a few of the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan, and, more especially, with some of the Sages and Saints. He extended full co-operation throughout the making of the book.

The AHAM Center at Asheboro, N.C., U.S.A., extended whole-hearted support to host the talks that has given shape to a major portion of this book. My heartfelt gratitude to each one of them, especially to its Spiritual Director, Stanley Davis, Jr., and Steve Hutchinson. Also, thanks to Kumar Palaniswamy and his wife Gayatri Devi who helped Ganesan while he was staying at AHAM Center in U.S.A. Last but not the least, I thank Visvanathan Venkatesan and his wife Sudha for assisting Ganesan at Arunachala in the page-making of the whole book.

Finally, to quote from this book, “While Bhagavan Ramana is the ‘Pole Star’ - the *Satguru* guiding us all - the Sages and Saints are like ‘Lighthouses’ throwing light wherever and whenever aspirants meet with dark patches of ignorance, doubts and wrong knowledge - *ajnana*, *sandheha*, *vipareedha jnana* - during their spiritual *sadhana*.”

As this book’s editor, I have been blessed and privileged to have encountered these ‘Lighthouses’ in my journey through these pages. I am certain, as readers, you too will feel their light shine on you.

Suresh Kailaash

Sarvam Sri Arunachala Ramanarpanamastu



Arunachala : Drawn by Sri Bhagavan in the note-book of Kunju Swami



FOREWORD



SWEET RECOLLECTIONS

V. Ganesan - the author of this book - is our most respected *Ganesanna*. He is Ramana Bhagavan's younger brother's grandson. So, he had the great good fortune of spending his entire childhood in the sacred presence of Sri Bhagavan. As a child, Sri Bhagavan has fondled him, taught him, and even chided him like a grandfather. Now, we are in a phase where all the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan are fast disappearing. Even a person who has seen Bhagavan Ramana once, that too casually, has become rare and precious. At this juncture, having someone who has lived up to his fourteenth year in the presence of Sri Bhagavan and has lived his entire life in Sri Ramanasramam, rendering service, is indeed invaluable. We cannot see people who have seen the Buddha or Adi Sankara, but we are now at a time where we can still see people who have seen Bhagavan Ramana - one of the greatest manifestations in the spiritual sphere.

So, the readers of *Ganesanna* should keep all the above in their mind while reading his words.

Ganesanna has asked me to write a 'Foreword' to his book on Saints and Sages. I am only a child in age and experience and hence don't consider myself capable in anyway to comment on his writings. I am recording some moments that I have spent with Anna. In this book, he has with his own inimitable persuasion, added the story of this body also. I tried my level best to stop him from writing about me. Instead of acceding to it, he made me proof-read that very article! I surrendered myself to the divine statement, "*Thy will be done*".

Ganesanna was familiar to me even before I came to Tiruvannamalai through *The Mountain Path*. On my very first visit, I saw Anna at the Ashram dining hall receiving the

devotees with folded hands in *namaskar*. After one or two years, Nataraja Iyer, the librarian, took me to him at '*Ananda Ramana*'. At that time, Anna was sitting in his hammock. Nataraja Iyer asked Anna to tell him about Sri Bhagavan's Self-enquiry '*Who am I?*' Anna asked him, "When a master like Sri Bhagavan tells you "YOU ARE THAT" -- "*TAT TVAM ASI*" -- , what is your response to that?"

N: I am not mature enough to understand that.

VG: Who is this 'I' which comes in between you and the Master's sacred words?.....Pay attention to the 'I'. That is the enquiry.

This novel way of dealing with the *Mahavakya* : '*TAT TVAM ASI*' and '*Who am I?*' had a *satori*-like effect on me that day. The atmosphere was silent and Arunachala was shining in all His majesty before us. To this day, that meeting with a great devotee of Sri Bhagavan remains very fresh in my mind.

Once I went to '*Ananda Ramana*' and Anna was alone. From our very first contact, Anna used to address me as '*Ramana*' only. Then too, he was sitting on his hammock and reading *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. The very scene was inspiring. A person who has seen Sri Bhagavan, had *sat sangh* with innumerable Saints and brought out the many unpublished dialogues with the Maharshi, e.g., *Talks*, *Day by Day* and *Letters*, sitting alone in a hermitage reading the *Talks* like a fresh *sadhaka*, was itself a sacred sight. At that time, Anna was going through some turmoil in his life.

He suddenly said to me "Where are the 'others', Ramana? Is not the 'other' a mere thought? 'What *IS*, is only the Self,' says Sri Bhagavan. Only with the 'other', you need 'thought'. With you -- the 'I AM' -- thought is unnecessary. To be without thoughts itself is the greatest penance. To stay in the I AM Here and Now is Sri Bhagavan's teaching." Those words sunk deep into me. It was an unforgettable *sat sangh* with him -- listening to the anecdotes on Sri Bhagavan, getting clarity on Self-enquiry and above all, sitting alone with him drinking his motiveless love.

That day I told him, "Anna I don't want to give talks like this. I wish to remain alone in meditation." Hearing this Ganesanna said "No, Ramana, you are an instrument of Sri Bhagavan. The secret of 'I AM' must be revealed -- '*jagathil tanmayam tazhaikka*' -- 'Arunachala gave His own *padam* (commandment) to me so that Self-knowledge will flourish in this world', says Sri Bhagavan. So too, he has given you this work. Actually all things are only 'Happening', there is no 'Doing' at all." Holding my hand like a child, he continued, "Dear Ramana! I also wish to join you in this spiritual joy." He even wrote this and gave it to me during his long periods of seclusion and *mounam* (silence).

He lived for long periods in *mounam* after retiring from Ashram work. The gate of 'Ananda Ramana' remained strictly locked. I was perhaps the only visitor in those days. For many days, I used to read to him books like *The Great Swan*. Mostly he would write to me his insights in beautiful language dripping with love. His motiveless love is something which one seldom comes across in this world. Those who expected outer signs, failed to see him as he appeared somewhat modern and unorthodox. They failed to notice his genuine love and surrender to Sri Bhagavan. With all my orthodoxy and traditional life, Sri Bhagavan made me see His child in 'Anna'. For me, any person who has seen Sri Bhagavan is worthy of worship, not to speak of 'Anna' who was named, touched and blessed by Sri Bhagavan and who was born in the same family. Above all, throughout his life he has been thinking, speaking, and writing only about the Great Master.



Dr.M.R.Krishnamurthy
Iyer

During the period of his rest after his heart surgery I used to visit him more frequently and at those times, Anuradha Ma used to make me speak on something connected to *Srimad Bhagavatham* and *Sri Bhagavan*. In those days, 'Anna' used to radiate and exude peace. It was not merely the presence of a heart patient. Listening to my talks one day, he said, "Ramana, you know, this *sat sangh* is my real treatment. When I listen to you, the real healing takes place. In my youth, I had a state of altered awareness for a protracted period. In that state, I left Mumbai and landed in holy Kasi. There by the Grace of the Lord, I recovered but in between I swooned and was left as dead in a mortuary. Some *Bairagis* (tribals) put heated iron on my back as a treatment. That wound became infected. In that state, my father traced me and brought me back to Tiruvannamalai. Here, Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer (whom Sri Bhagavan used to address as 'Our Ashram Doctor') treated me. Along with the medication, he used to narrate lot of Sri Bhagavan's anecdotes. Once he said "Ganesa! These stories of Sri Bhagavan are the real herbs that is doing the healing and not me or the medicines." Saying this 'Anna' as usual patted his hands on my thigh with affection and said "Ramana ! You are doing the same treatment now. Ramana! My life is very enriched, very blissful. The days I spent with the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan are enough for me. Only in them, did I recognize who Sri Bhagavan truly IS. Although I had intimate contacts with Sri Bhagavan, I looked at him only as my *thaathaa* (grandfather). After that, I got the love of Yogi Ramsuratkumar and now, you are pouring love on me." Those words were heart-melting!

It was *Ganesanna* who took us to all places connected to Sri Bhagavan -- like, Pachai Amman Kovil, Pavazhakundru, Gurumurtham, and to various spots in Sri Arunachaleswara Temple -- Vannimarathu Pillayar, Iluppai tree, etc., where Sri Bhagavan had spent considerable time. He took us innumerable times for outer and inner *Giri Pradakshina*, narrating a new incident about Sri Bhagavan or significance of some sacred spot around the Hill, leaving me in awe about how he remembered all those details about Sri Bhagavan!

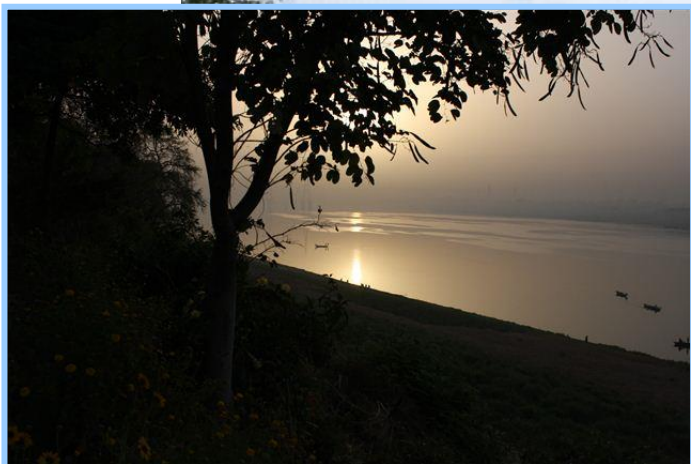
The secret behind this phenomenal '*Siddhi*' is nothing but his passionate love for Sri Bhagavan.

He was very particular that Hema, Sadasiva and I accompany him to holy Kasi. He made all arrangements for our family to stay on the very banks of Ganga at Krishnamurti Foundation. There we had wonderful *sat sangh* with him for almost twenty days. 'Anna' and I have thus spent innumerable days and nights in spiritual inundation, unmindful of passage of hours and days. Those days of great peace and joy still continue and that alone is worthy in life. Things like name, fame and recognition from the world are worthless and dangerous as they take us away from God.

Although I discouraged 'Anna' many times from writing about other Saints, especially living ones, he wrote this book persuaded by the loving request of the *Mahatma* of Velpur. Let this book help innumerable spiritual seekers is my prayer to Sri Bhagavan from the bottom of my Heart.

These few flowers of 'Sweet Recollections' are offered as gratitude to Ganesanna, who gave us so many Gems from Sri Bhagavan's Treasure Trove!

RAMANA CHARANA TIRTHA
(NOCHUR VENKATARAMAN)



Having darshan of Sun rising over Ganga Mata



MEETINGS WITH SAGES AND SAINTS

[Lighthouses Guiding Seeker's Journey Within]

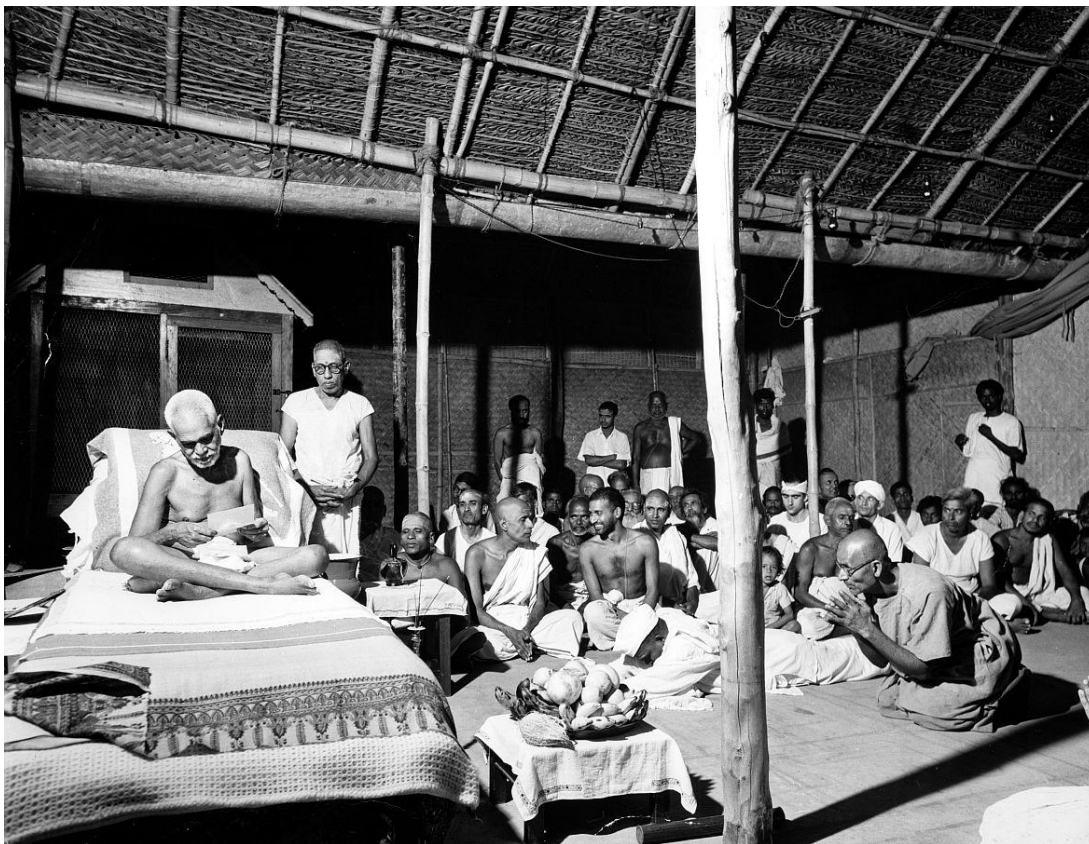


INTRODUCTION

Sages and Saints are there all over the World, and they have been there through all periods of human history. Like us, they are born with the same faculties of 'body', 'mind' and 'five senses'. They live in the same world of 'attractions' and 'distractions'. Like us, they are also involved in varied activities. Then, what is so special about them ? Who is a 'Sage' and who is a 'Saint' ?

The dictionary gives us the following definitions : "A 'Sage' is a profoundly wise man". "A 'Saint' is a very virtuous person, a person of great sacredness". We may safely describe the 'Sage' or the 'Saint' as a completely natural human being possessing the qualities of 'simplicity', 'humility', 'spontaneity', 'Wisdom' and 'compassion'. A sacred person is one in whose presence, 'Silence' and 'Stillness' are unmistakably experienced – in spite of one's limited and turbulent 'mind' !

Although the Truth is heard and also understood, at times, it is forgotten; and, mistakes are committed when facts face a person. Ignorance takes over Knowledge and confusion is the result. In such dire situations, the Sage or the Saint alone can give us the right push back to our 'Source'. Hence, it is very essential that one has *sat sangh* – association with the wise – as often as possible.



‘.....devotees in the Presence of Sri Bhagavan.....’

So many hundreds of devotees who came to the presence of Sri Bhagavan, got their overactive minds quietened, instantly. Some who had written down on sheets of paper their many doubts to be put to the Maharshi, got them all dissolved by merely sitting in his presence -- being in his proximity -- without the need to raise them, at all !

I have interviewed more than four hundred devotees who had come to Sri Bhagavan. I had a mental questionnaire prepared with specific questions. While their answers differed to all other questions, everyone's answer to my second question : “When Sri Bhagavan looked at you, how did you feel” was the same : “I experienced a Peace that I have never experienced before !”

Sri Bhagavan was often asked, “How can we remain in that state of Peace which we experience in your presence, even after we go away from Arunachala”. His reply would be : “Enquire, who feels the absence of Peace. Turn inwards and seek the Source. Then and there, the same Peace is available to all, as one's own ‘Inner Silence’.”

To the extent one turns within and experiences the Quietude, to that extent one is not distracted by the World. This is your experience, undeniably, isn't it ? Such steady and repeated experiences of Inner Quietude, puts one in the state of *Sat sangh*.

Bhagavan Ramana, while going through ancient Hindu texts brought to him for his elucidation, selected five verses extolling the virtue and indispensable worth of the greatness of the Sages and Saints. I quote them

The first two verses are :

“In the company of Sages, attachment vanishes; and with attachment, illusion. Freed from illusion, one attains stability and thence Liberation while yet alive. Therefore, seek the company of sages.”

“Not by listening to preachers, nor by study of books, not by meritorious deeds nor by any other means can one attain that Supreme State, which is attainable only through the association with the Sages and the clear quest of Self.”

Sri Bhagavan to support it, narrated the following story :

“Vitthal [the name of Lord Krishna at Pandarpur temple] found His devotee Namdev had not realized the Supreme Truth and wanted to teach him. The Saints of Maharashtra had gone on a pilgrimage in a group and had returned to Pandarpur. Gora Kumbhar was one among them and invited them all to his residence and offered a feast. At the feast, Saint Jnaneshwar, in collusion with Gora, told Gora publicly, “You are a potter, daily engaged in making pots and testing them to see which are properly baked and which are not. These pots before you (i.e., the Saints) are the pots of *Brahma*. See which of these are sound and which are not.” Thereupon, Gora said, ‘Yes Swami, I shall do so,’ and took up the stick with which he used to tap his pots to test their soundness;



Saint Namdev offering worship to Lord Vitthal

and holding it aloft in his hand, he went to each of his guest and tapped each on the head as he usually did to his pots. Each guest humbly submitted to such tapping.

“But, when Gora approached Namdev, the latter indignantly called out : ‘You potter, what do you mean by coming to tap me with that stick ?’ Gora thereupon told Jnaneshwar, ‘Swami, all the other pots have been properly baked. This one, (i.e., Namdev) is not yet properly baked’. All the assembled guests burst into laughter. Namdev felt greatly humiliated and ran up to the temple to Vitthal with whom he was on the most intimate terms -- playing with him, eating with him, sleeping with him and so on. Namdev complained to Vitthal of the humiliation he had been subjected to -- one who is the closest friend and companion of God Himself. Vitthal (who of course knew all this) pretended to sympathise with him, asked for all the details of the happenings at Gora’s house. After hearing everything, Vitthal said, ‘Why should you not have kept quiet and submitted to the tapping, as all others did ? That is why all this trouble has come.’ Thereupon Namdev cried all the more and said, ‘You also want to join the others and humiliate me. Why should I have submitted like the others ? Am I not your closest friend, your child ?’ Vitthal said, ‘You have not properly understood the Truth. And, you won’t understand if I tell you. But, go to the Saint who is in a ruined temple in the forest. He will be able to give you Enlightenment.’

“Namdev accordingly went there and found an old, unassuming man sleeping in a corner of the temple with his feet on a Shiva Linga [idol, ‘*Linga*’, is the symbol for Lord Shiva] . Namdev could hardly believe this was the man from whom he – the companion of God Vitthal – was to gain Enlightenment. However, as there was none else there, Namdev went near the old man and clapped his hands. The old man woke up with a start and seeing Namdev, said, ‘Oh, you are Namdev whom Vitthal has sent here. Come, come !’ Namdev was dumb-founded and began to think, ‘This must be a great man’. Still, he thought it was revolting that any man, however great, should be resting his feet on a Shiva Linga. He asked the old man, ‘You seem to be a great personage. But, is it proper for you to have your feet on a Shiva Linga ?’ The old man replied, ‘Oh, are my feet on a Shiva Linga ? Where is it ? Please remove my feet elsewhere.’ Namdev removed the feet and put them in various places. Wherever they were put, there was a Shiva Linga. Finally, he took them on his lap and he himself became a Shiva Linga. Then, he realized the Truth. The Saint said, ‘Now, you can go back.’ ”

Sri Bhagavan added : “ It is to be noted that only when he surrendered himself, and touched the feet of his *Guru*, Enlightenment came.”

After his final Enlightenment, Namdev returned to his house and for some days did not go to Vitthal’s temple, though it had been his habit to visit Vitthal at the temple every

day, and spend most of his time with Him. So, after a few days, Vitthal himself went to Namdev's house and like a guileless soul enquired how it was that Namdev has forgotten him and never visited him. Namdev replied, 'No more of your fooling me, Oh, Lord! I know now. Where is the place you are not ?'

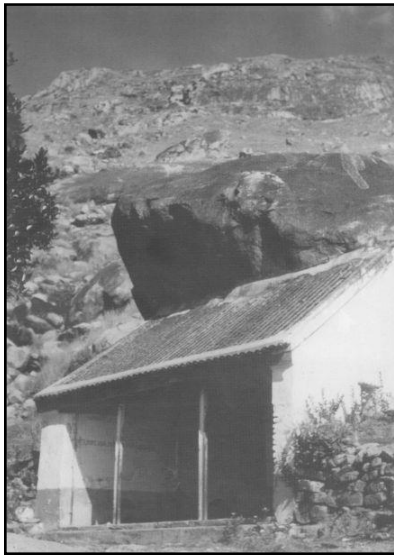
Then, Vitthal said, 'So, you now understand the Truth. That is why you had to be sent for this final lesson from a Sage !'

Sri Bhagavan particularly picked up this story only to point out that even if one is a friend of God, one has to be enlightened in the *sat sangh* of a Sage only.

Verse No. 3 :

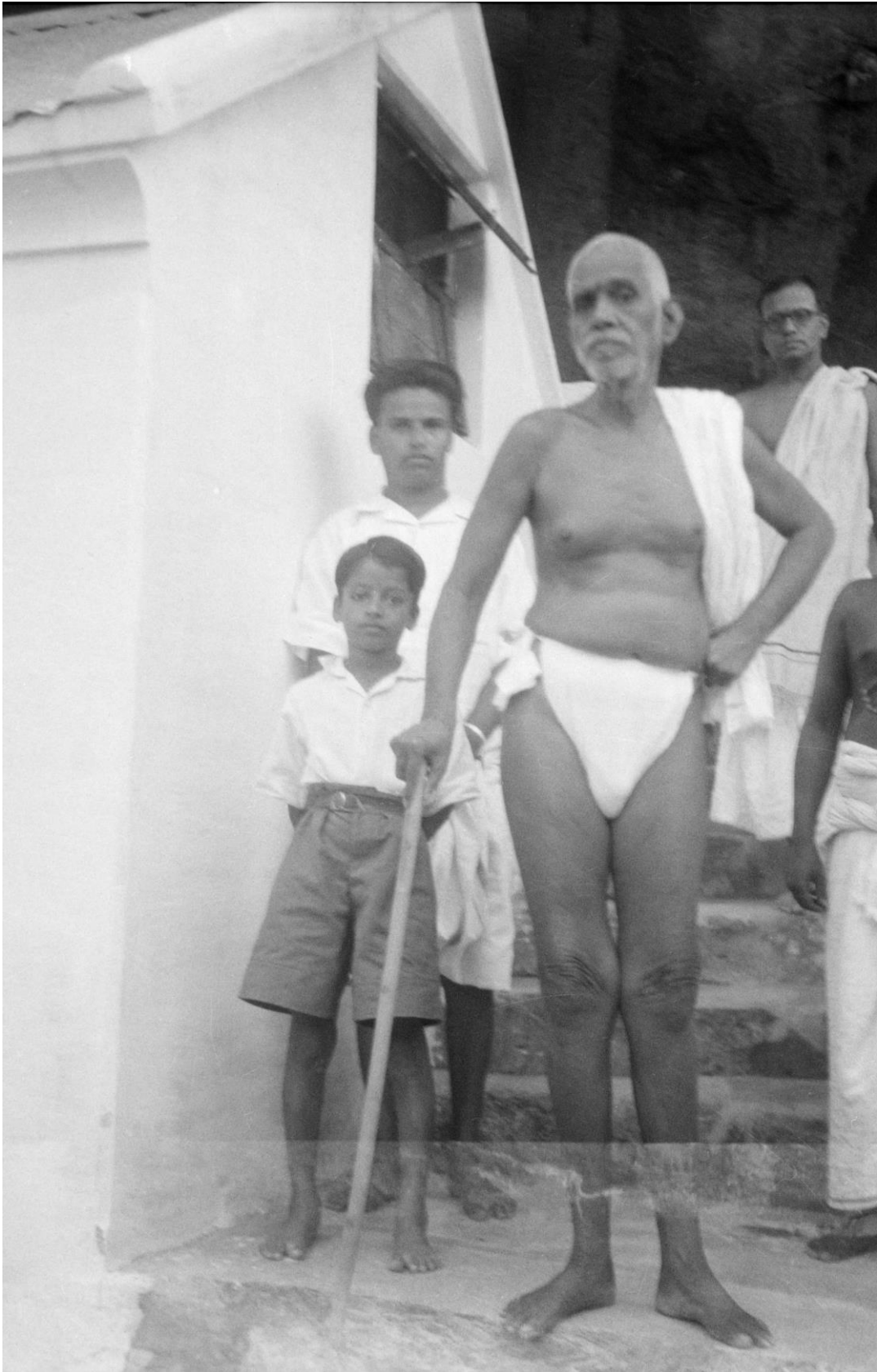
“When one has learned to love the company of Sages, where is the need for all these rules of disciplines ? When a pleasant, cool southern breeze is blowing, what need is there for a hand fan ? ”

Sri Bhagavan said : “When I was up the hill, along with her school-mates of the same age, Chellamma (daughter of Echamma) used to come. Sometimes, they used to bring their dolls and perform the dolls' marriages. At other times, they used to bring rice, *dhall*, etc., cook and eat and give me also from their preparation.

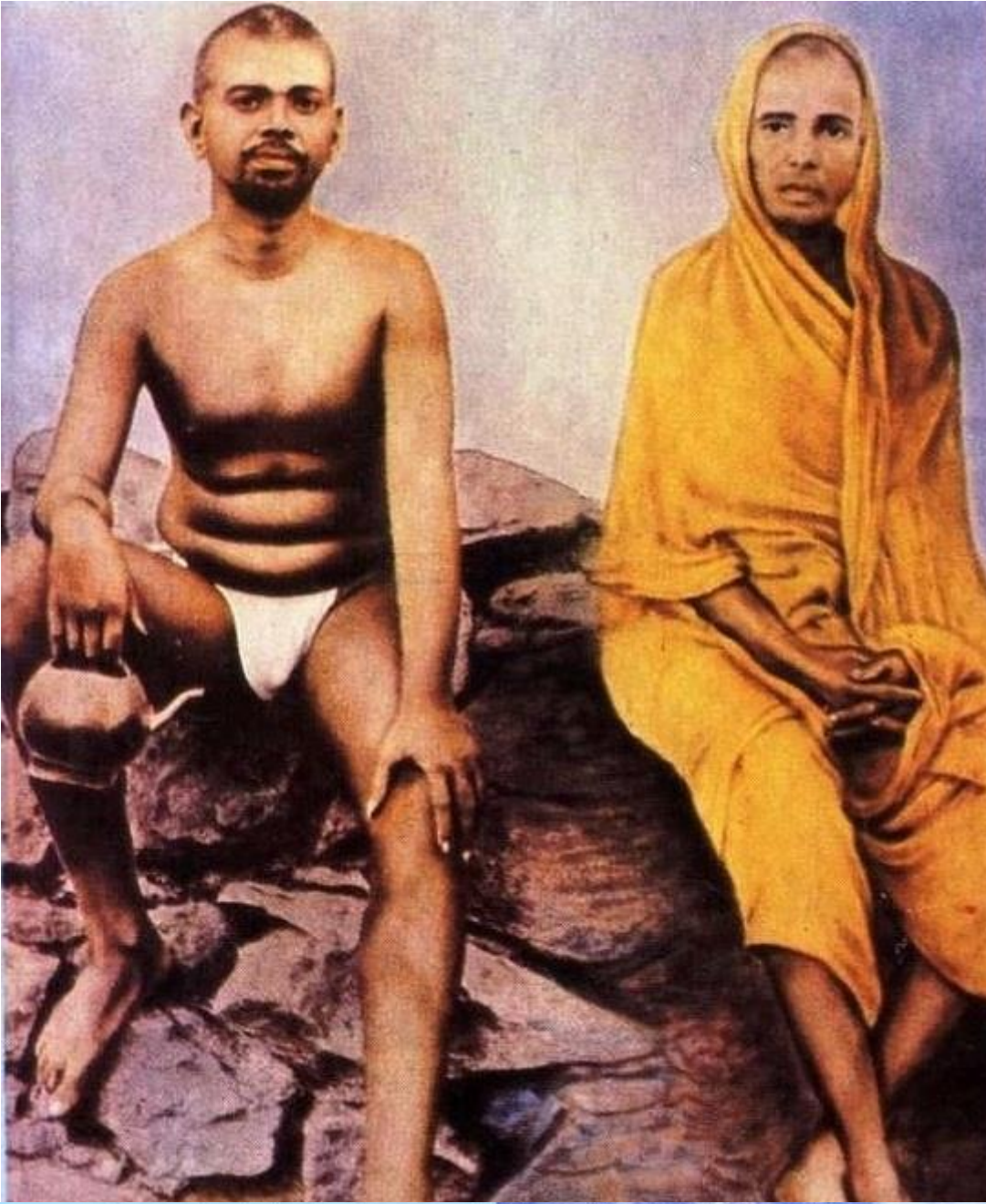


Virupaksha Cave (an early photo)

“Echamma used to fast every now and then. Her daughter Chellamma too started to fast with Echamma. But then Chellamma was very young and used to suffer a lot in consequence. Echamma sent food for me through her. One day, Chellamma brought me food even though she was fasting that day. How could I eat when she was not taking any food ? I told her that she should not indulge in such fasts being young, and somehow prevailed upon her to eat. Next day, while she was coming up the hill with food, she found a piece of paper. It appeared to contain some Sanskrit *sloka* and so she brought it with her to show it to me. When I saw that, I found it contained this *sloka*. I said, 'Look. It contains the same thing I told you about yesterday.' She asked me what its meaning was and so, I translated it into a verse in Tamil and explained its meaning to her. Thereafter, she gave up her fast. She had great faith in me.”



***Sri Bhagavan at Skandasramam - Ganesan with his father and T.P.Ramachandra Iyer -
(standing behind)***



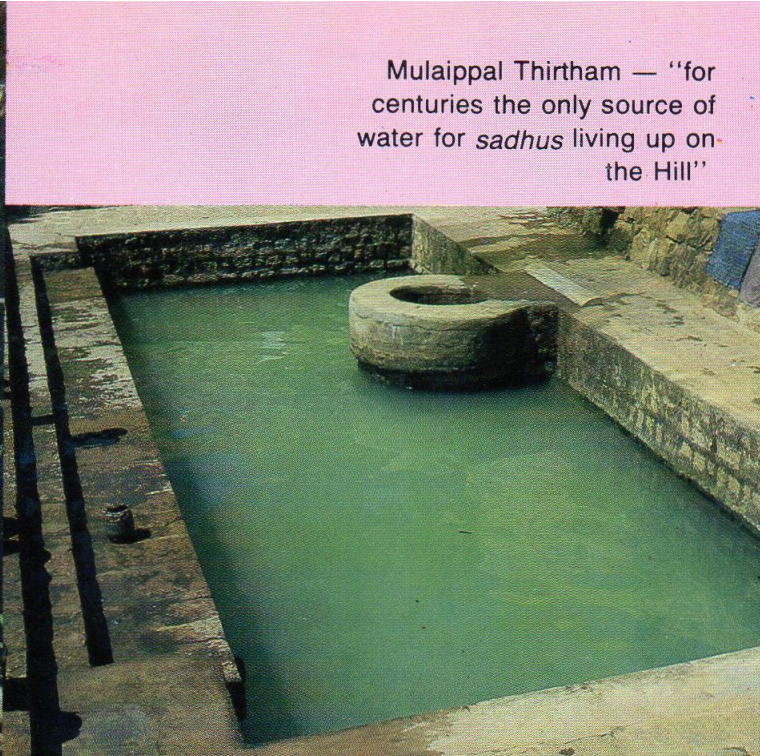
The Sacred Son
and the Holy Mother.

Pavalakunru (back view):
 "...The best course, therefore,
 is to remain silent" — a portion
 of His written *upadesa* to His
 Mother.





Mango Tree Cave:
Sri Bhagavan's
summer residence.



Mulaippal Thirtham — "for
centuries the only source of
water for *sadhus* living up on
the Hill"



Virupaksha Cave
— the Maharshi's
abode for 17
years, where
blossoming of his
jnana granthas and
bhakti granthas
began.



Skandashram —
"a peace-suffused
atmosphere"

Verses No. 4 and 5 :

“Heat is overcome by the cool light of the Moon; want by the wish-fulfilling tree; and, sin by the holy river Ganges. Those three – heat, want and sin – flee at the august sight of the peerless Sage.”

“Holy rivers, which are only water; and idol of Gods which are made of stones and metals, are not as mighty as the Sages are. For, while they make one pure in the course of a long time, the Sage’s eyes by a mere glance, purify at once.”

I again quote Sri Bhagavan who once said : One day, I was going out from Skandashram. That day, Chellamma had some bit of a newspaper in her hand and was learning by heart a song from ‘Yoga Vasishta’, in praise of the benefits of *sat sangha* :

“By the association with holy men, the imperfect will become perfect, danger good luck and the inauspicious auspicious. For those who have bathed in the Ganges of fellowship with such realized souls, *homa*, *yagna*, penance, alms--giving, bathing in sacred rivers, are all unnecessary. Seek, therefore, by all means, the company of the wise, which is a boat to carry one across the ocean of birth and death.”

* * * * *

A devotee asked the Maharshi : “My profession requires that I cannot remain in the vicinity of Sages and Saints. Can I have Realisation even in the absence of *sat sangh* ?”

Sri Bhagavan assured him : “ ‘SAT’ is ‘*aham pratyaya saram*’ = meaning, “the SELF of selves”. The Saint is that SELF of selves. He is immanent in all. Can any one remain without the SELF ? No. So, no one is away from ‘*sat sangh*’.”

“The man is always the SELF and yet, he does not know it. He confounds it with the non-self, *viz.*, the body, *etc.* Such confusion is due to ‘ignorance’. If the ignorance be wiped out, the confusion will cease to exist and the true Knowledge will be unfolded. By remaining in contact with Realised Sages, the man gradually loses the ‘ignorance’ until its removal is complete. The eternal SELF is thus revealed.”

“ ‘*Sat Sangha*’ means ‘*sangha*’ (association) with ‘*SAT*’. ‘*SAT*’ is only the SELF. Since the SELF is not now understood to be ‘*Sat*’, the company of the Sage who has thus understood is sought. That is ‘*Satsangha*’. Introversion results. Then, ‘*SAT*’ is revealed.”
[“***Talks***” Nos.482, 350, 282]

Just as even the strongest man, like Hercules, cannot lift the stool on which he is seated, we can never transcend the ‘illusion’ cast on us by our own ‘mind’, and get re-established in the Reality which is our true state of Being. It is true that God created every being equal in all respects ! Yet, if one mistakes oneself to be a separate individual -- away and apart from the single, solid Reality which every one of us truly IS -- one has to seek a source which will help us release ourselves from the ‘illusion’ of separateness.

While one’s ‘mind’ can readily accept the concept of ‘superior beings’ -- like, God, *Messiahs*, Incarnations, *Avatars* – it refuses to accept that it itself is the very same ‘Superior Being’. One needs enormous help to lift oneself up to realize that one is ever the Reality only. Sages and Saints who have already trodden the path and transcended the ‘limitations’, are the ‘Milestones’, the ‘Lighthouses’ on the path of the aspirant’s ‘Journey Within’ ! Therefore, seeking the Sages and Saints, being in their presence and imbibing their spiritual instructions is the safest, surest and quickest ‘way’ !

‘TRUTH’ is ever ‘*there*’ shining powerfully ; and, the spiritual aspirant is ever ‘*here*’, ignorant of the ever-existing ‘TRUTH’. Bhagavan Ramana refers to ‘TRUTH’ as the “Higher Power”. The “Higher Power” is the common property of all – no exceptions, no partiality, at all ! Yet, the ignorant aspirant feels the duality of ‘*there*’ and ‘*here*’. This is the ignorance that should go, that should get wiped out. The Maharshi pointedly referred to this ‘ignorance’ as the fault of ‘identifying oneself with one’s body and mind’ and thereby ignoring the truth that one is ever the “Higher Power”. He guided the aspirants to shift one’s attention from non-truth to the ‘TRUTH’ ” .

The act of shifting one’s attention from the non-real ‘body’ and ‘mind’ to the ever-existent Reality of one’s own Pure Being is generally termed as ‘spiritual *sadhana*’. One needs guidance to do spiritual *sadhana* ! The Buddhist analogy – ‘finger pointing to the Moon’ – is a good example. Likewise, the Sage, the Saint does not create the Reality, but only removes one’s ignorance, so that one can locate and see the Reality ! Unlike in the analogy where the wayfarer enables one to see the Moon ‘outside’ of oneself, the Sage enables one to recognise the Reality ‘within’ oneself as one’s own ever-existent TRUTH !

Hence, the Maharshi emphasized : “**Seek the company of Sages**” !

* * * * *

Having defined the true significance and the importance of spiritual *sadhana* and *sat sangh* (the company of Sages and Saints), I feel, it would be helpful if I shared with you as to how I was guided throughout my spiritual life. Sri Bhagavan said: "The efforts made by the aspirant and the pouring in of Guru's Grace on him, are synonymous and simultaneous. They are not two different things, but one and the same process of spiritual fulfillment." The importance of this sharing is to focus attention on and emphasize how the 'Higher Power' guides a seeker. Please merge with the content of the spiritual stories. It will help you in your own spiritual *sadhana*.

I had the good fortune of being brought up in Sri Ramanasramam by the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan who knew Sri Bhagavan as 'God'. Until I was fourteen, I only saw Sri Bhagavan as my granduncle and an extraordinarily compassionate old man! I obtained a degree in Economics in 1956. For the next two years, viz., up to 1958, I made fervent efforts to get a job and help support my father financially. To begin with, I stayed at the Ashram and started helping my father with the Ashram work. Then, neither did I have any inclination towards spiritual life nor to stay on in the Ashram on a permanent basis. But, all my efforts to get employed outside, failed!



Dr.T.M.P.Mahadevan At that time, the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Madras, Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, used to often visit the Ashram. I was drawn to him, his erudition and his calm nature. In 1958, he guided me to join the University for a Master's Course in Philosophy, as it was also the same year that Sri Bhagavan's unique teaching of Self-Enquiry was being included in the syllabus. For the next two years I studied in the University of Madras and obtained a Master's degree in Philosophy. I thus learnt both eastern and western philosophy as academic subjects. While Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan and other three professors taught eastern philosophy, western philosophy was taught exclusively by a genius, Dr. C.T.K. Chari. His elucidations on Berkeley, Hegel, Immanuel Kant and Henri Bergson captivated my heart.

When I once expressed to Dr.Chari my wonder and elation in listening to his exposition on the philosophy of Henri Bergson, he said: "Though other philosophers did not agree with his theory on '*Elan Vitale*' [Eternal NOW], Henri Bergson is the one philosopher who came very close to the *Vedanta* philosophy of the Hindus." He added: "All the western philosophies put together, in spite of their brilliant analysis, could at the most arrive only at '*Karmam Jadam*' ['Actions are insentient ']. For Bhagavan Ramana,



Dr.C.T.K.Chari

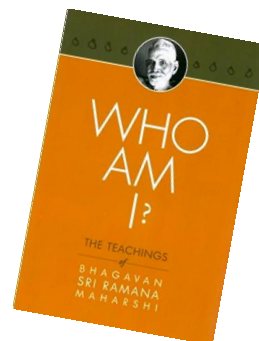
it is the beginning of his exposition on Truth. The very first verse in his 'Thirty Verses of Instruction', commences with this statement. Then, he goes on building up to his conclusion that one's own being is the Final Truth. How true it is ! Western philosophies could not progress further, as their dependence is totally based on the brain's understanding and never based on intuitive experience. Bhagavan Ramana, however, gives an acceptable blend between logical conclusions and intuitive confirmations through his practical method of the 'Who Am I?' enquiry. Through Self-Enquiry each one can directly experience the Truth in oneself!"

On the completion of my Master's in Philosophy, Dr.Mahadevan advised me to take up the three year Ph.D. course. He said that I could bring out a systematic research paper on the greatness and necessity of Bhagavan Ramana's Self-Enquiry and get a Doctorate in Philosophy. Another professor suggested that I bring out a paper synthesizing Bhagavan Ramana's Self-Enquiry with the essence of all existing religions. Both professors were very fond of me and interested in my welfare. Somehow, I was not fully convinced.

I went to Dr. Chari and told him about my plight. He listened attentively and then asked me, "Do you want to get a Doctorate in Philosophy, like all of us? What are you going to do after you obtain the Doctorate? Become a Professor of Philosophy in some University? And lecture on philosophy all your life? Look at us. We talk on philosophy, every day; but, what is our spiritual achievement? Nil." I was dumbfounded on listening to him put his point so very forcefully!

He got up, came near me and putting his hands on my shoulders, said in a melting voice, "Ganesan! Do you want to live a true spiritual life, like your granduncle or give courses on the theories of philosophies, all your life, like us Professors ?"

After a few moments, he continued: "Go and live at the Ashram. Practise your granduncle's supreme teaching of True Spirituality. His teaching of 'Who Am I?' Self-Enquiry is the pinnacle of all philosophies - the highest! Live that teaching, Ganesan! To quote Swami Vivekananda: 'Any philosophy, especially *Advaita*, as theory, will be a windmill around one's neck, whereas its practise is Heaven on Earth'. I bless you!"



Dr.Chari was my first mentor and his blessing enabled me to come back to the Ashram in 1959 and stay permanently there. That guidance to stay at the Ashram by Dr.Chari initiated an avalanche of future guidance that were shared by the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan. It was one Old Devotee or the other who guided me -- literally took me -- to the Sages and Saints who in turn helped me gain spiritual maturity.



T.K.Sundaresa Iyer

In 1959 itself, *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer revealed the greatness of the *Siddha Purusha* YOGI RAMSURATKUMAR and then, in 1960 sent me to SWAMI RAMDAS; Swami Ramdas guided me to MATAJI KRISHNA BAI; Munagala Venkataramiah, author of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* made me experience the spiritual greatness of MOTHER RAMA DEVI; Balarama Reddiar took me to Madras and made me receive the blessings of MA ANANDAMAYEE MA; Framji and Dorab took me to J. KRISHNAMURTI and later, Framji's daughter Soona Nicholson took me to NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ.

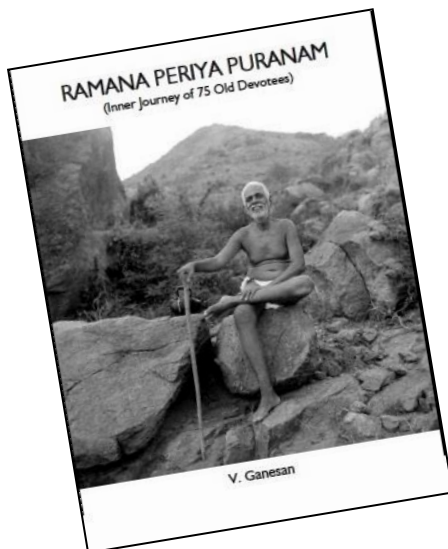
The guidance of the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan continued in my life. I learnt that *sadhana*, guidance, Grace and spiritual progress are a continuum, similar to one getting onto a 'conveyor belt'. The very momentum of one taking up the spiritual path and getting guidance from a Sage, will take the seeker smoothly and assuredly towards the destination of Self-Realisation!

You will be interested to know that as recently as this year [2016], Anuradha and I were taken by a devotee of Sri Bhagavan, to a Saint living at Velpur in Andhra Pradesh. He is addressed by all as '*Mouna*' Swami, since he is in total silence from 1985 onwards. He is a true follower of our beloved Bhagavan. It can safely be said that he lives in principle and practice the instructions of Sri Bhagavan, in almost every way.



Velpur 'Mouna' Swami

After reading '*Ramana Periya Puranam*', Velpur '*Mouna*' Swami instantly arranged for its translation into the local



language, Telugu. Then, he got several thousand copies of it printed and had them distributed to the aspirants who flock to have his *darshan*. Coming across many references in that book to my having met many Saints and the spiritual benefits I gained through these meetings, he requested me to write them all down in a book. He said that just as '*Ramana Periya Puranam*' had brought to light how the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan benefitted from their close association with Sri Bhagavan, this second book, '*Meetings with Sages and Saints*', would help spiritual aspirants to seek the company of Sages and Saints and thereby get benefitted.

"While Bhagavan Ramana is the 'Pole Star' - the *Satguru* guiding us all - the Sages and Saints are like the 'Lighthouses' throwing light wherever and whenever the aspirants meet with dark patches of ignorance, doubts and wrong knowledge - *ajnana*, *sandheha*, *vipareedha jnana* - during their spiritual *sadhana*."



V.Ganesan, A.Ramana, Anuradha, Elizabeth MacDonald

I did not feel inspired to write it in seclusion; and, I kept procrastinating, postponing, until Anuradha reminded me how the founder of AHAM, A. Ramana and Elizabeth MacDonald wholeheartedly cooperated during the past by arranging 49 talks by me, each lasting an hour, and also put them up on their AHAM Website - you will be happy to know that already more than 300,000 downloads of this compact compendium have happened from this website. She said that we would request, likewise, the present Director of AHAM, Stanley Davis, Jr., to arrange for these talks on '*Meetings with Sages and Saints*'. He has extended a very hearty welcome to us both and here we are in front of you....!

I humbly request you to read this book, '*Meetings with Sages and Saints*', with interest and attention as it will benefit you tremendously in your spiritual *sadhana*.

I have apportioned each article into three sections: 'Life of the Sage', 'Teaching of the Sage' and the 'Sage and Me'. While the 'Life' and 'Teaching' are very important, the third part dealing with me, perhaps, might help you in understanding the ups and downs in your efforts to mature spiritually.

I assure you that in every such effort of yours, the Grace of Guru Ramana and the blessings of the Sages and Saints will empower you in your march towards the goal of Self-Realisation.

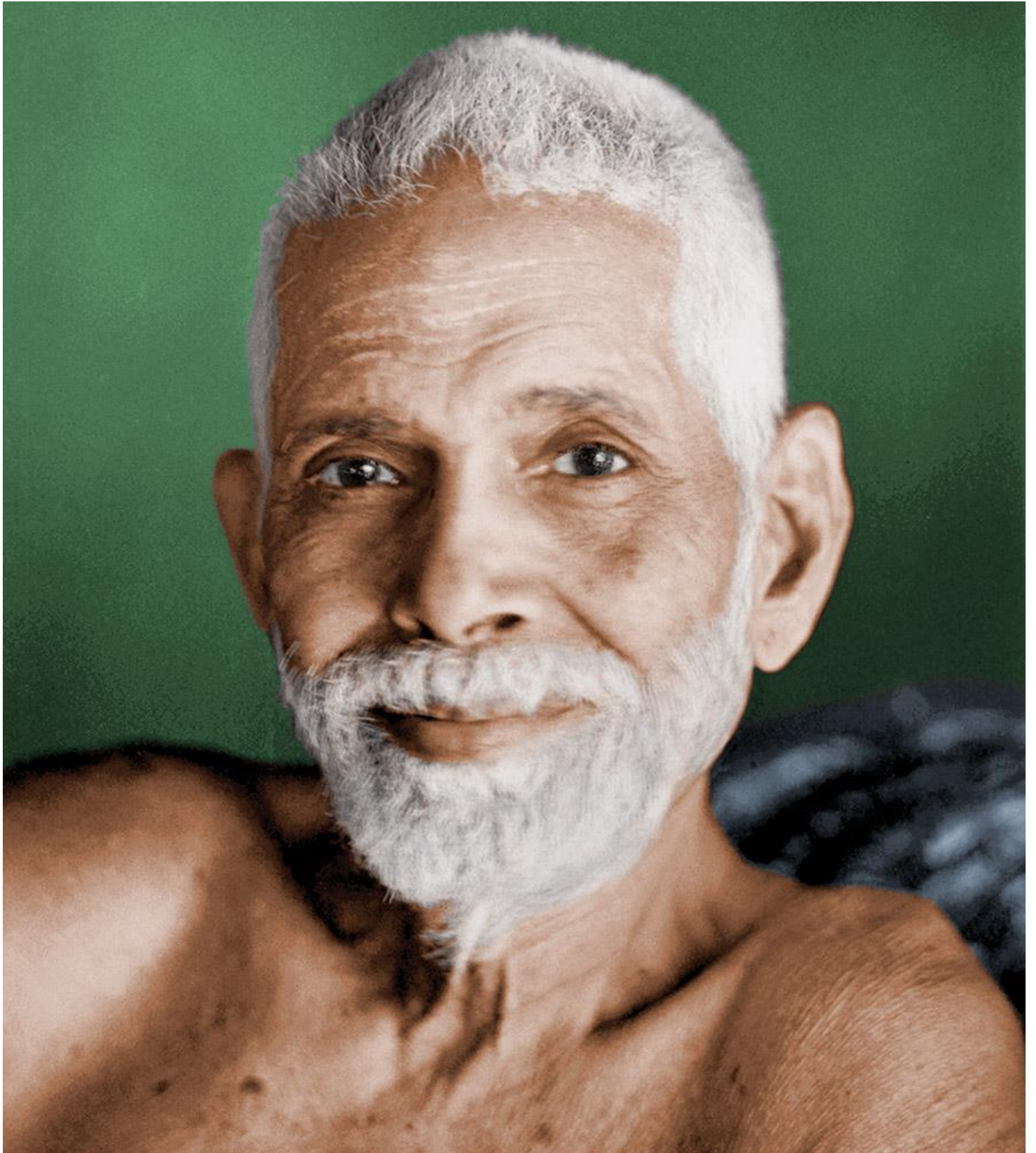
Sri Bhagavan is blessing us all :

***"Very easy is 'Self-Realisation'.
Truly very easy, indeed!"***

* * * * *



***Ramana-bhaktas of AHAM Center, Asheville, USA
who listened to the twelve talks on the 'Meetings with Sages and Saints'***

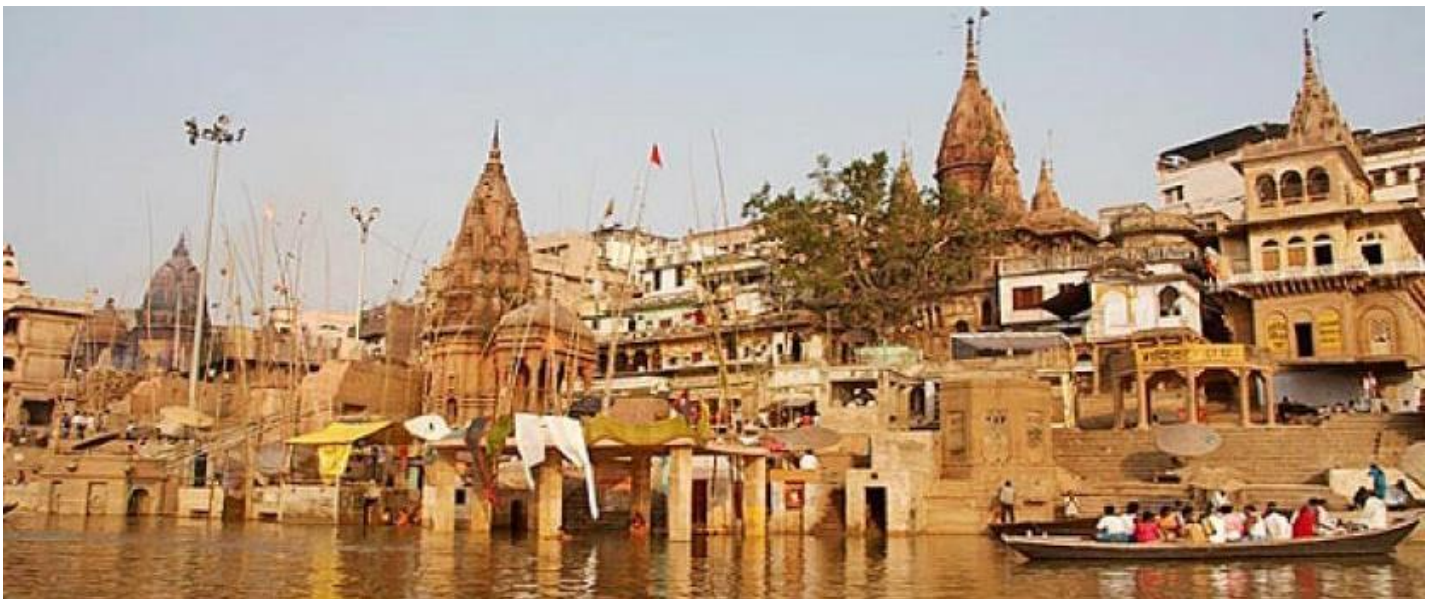


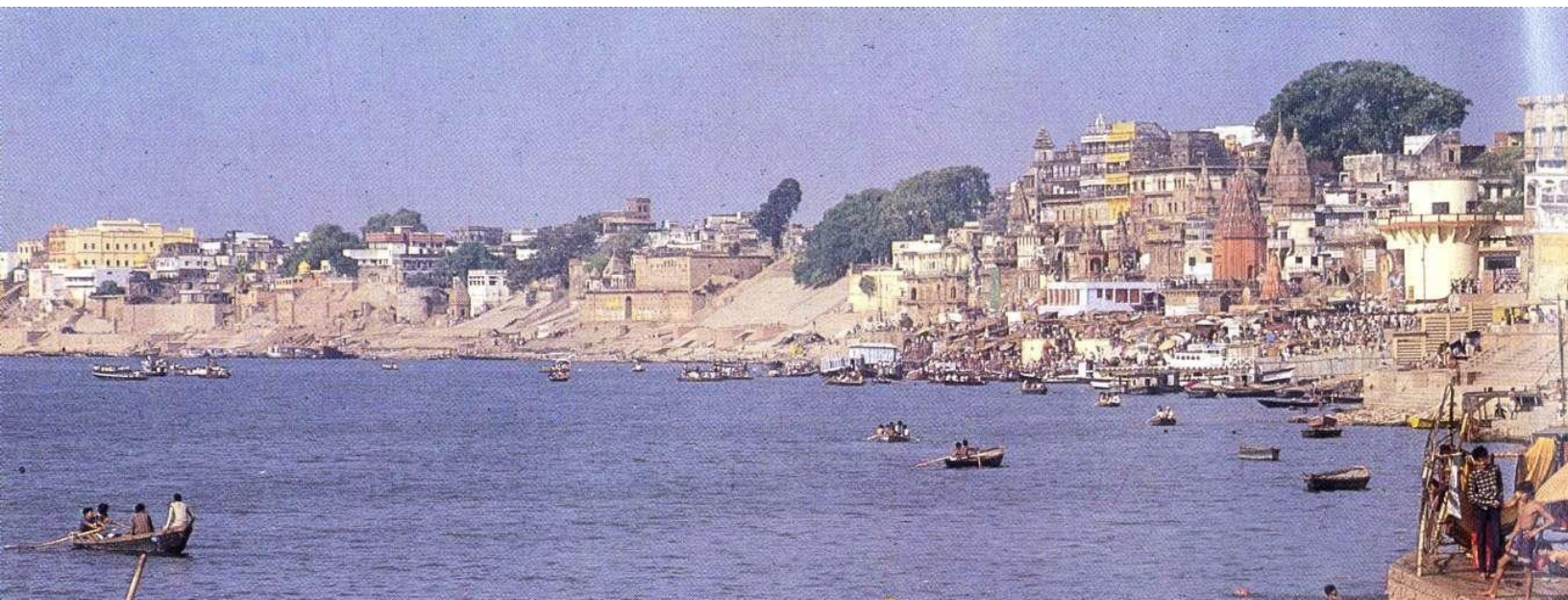
BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI



Life

Kashi, also called Varanasi, is one of the oldest cities in the world. Sages and Saints have regarded it as the most sacred place since time immemorial. The holy river Ganga turns back towards its source -- the Himalayas -- at Kashi. So, it has the name '*Uttara Vahini*' here, meaning 'north flowing'. Such a turn towards its source, Sages say, is most auspicious for obtaining peace and spiritual fulfillment. Through all ages, Sages have visited Kashi for the sole purpose of taking a dip in the *Uttara Vahini*





“..... 'Uttara Vahini' - river Ganga turns towards its source.....”

- an act which they felt helped them turn within to their Source and remain established in the Reality of Inner Silence.

A child was born in a South Indian village -- *Tiruchuzhi* -- on December 30, 1879, on the sacred '*Ardhra Darshan*' day – the day Lord Shiva chose to appear as a Column of 'Fire'. And it was born at the auspicious time when the idol of the Lord in the local Shiva temple, returned to its shrine inside the temple, after going in procession on the main streets of the village. This very significant event of returning or turning within became the essence of the life and teaching of this child, **Venkataraman**.



Tiruchuzhi



Madurai

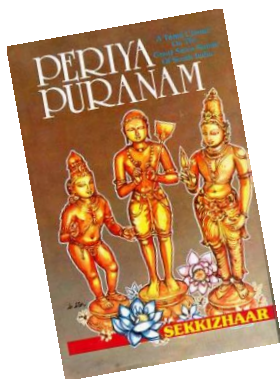


Mother Meenakshi

It is usually, reported in books about Sri Ramana's childhood that "There was nothing in particular to record. He was an ordinary child, like all other children." But the truth is that the Truth – '**Arunachala**' – began shining in the Heart of the child **Venkataraman**, right from his birth. Describing the sound and shining of '**Arunachala**' in his Heart, Sri Bhagavan himself wrote in one of his poems: "From the age of innocence, the sound and shining of '**Arunachala**' in my Heart was heralding '**IT**' as something of surpassing grandeur." Needless to say that the child's attention was drawn within all the time to the throbbing *sphurana*, the vibration of '**Arunachala**' !

One day, Father Arunachala induced the young Venkataraman -- from within -- to ask a visiting relative where he was coming from. He replied in one word, "**Arunachala**." It was the very first time, that the youth heard the sound '**Arunachala**' from outside of him! Later, '**Arunachala**', the Fire aspect of Lord Shiva, gave Venkataraman the 'Death Experience' – and awakened him to the 'Self' within. While experiencing 'death', the lad dived within and enquired as to who died. He realized that while the body died, he remained as the 'Spirit' – the eternal 'I AM'. Instantly, the boy of sixteen blossomed spiritually into a 'Sage of Steady Wisdom'.

He also came across "**Periya Puranam**" a Tamil book about 63 Shiva Saints.



Immersed in it, he longed for Lord Shiva's blessing to be like one among them. Father Arunachala accepted His son's inner longing and drew Him like a magnet to His Abode. After leaving a letter behind, in which Venkataraman wrote, "I am going in search of my Father..." – the youth left Madurai and reached the slopes of the holy hill, Arunachala. For 54 years, he stayed unmoved from the base of the holy hill which he fondly addressed as his '**Father**' and his '**Guru**'. During those early arduous days



in Arunachala, he was totally absorbed in introversion, rejoicing in the 'Inner Silence'. Later, he was given the glowing and befitting appellation, '**Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi**'. Soon, "...leaving a letter behind..." devotees started gathering around and basking themselves in the healing presence of His Stillness and Peace!

From his devotion and surrender to Arunachala, poems sprung forth spontaneously. In one of them, he wrote: "This Hill, the lodestone of lives, arrests the movements of any one who so much as thinks of It, draws him face to face with It and fixes him motionless like Itself and feeds upon the soul thus ripened."

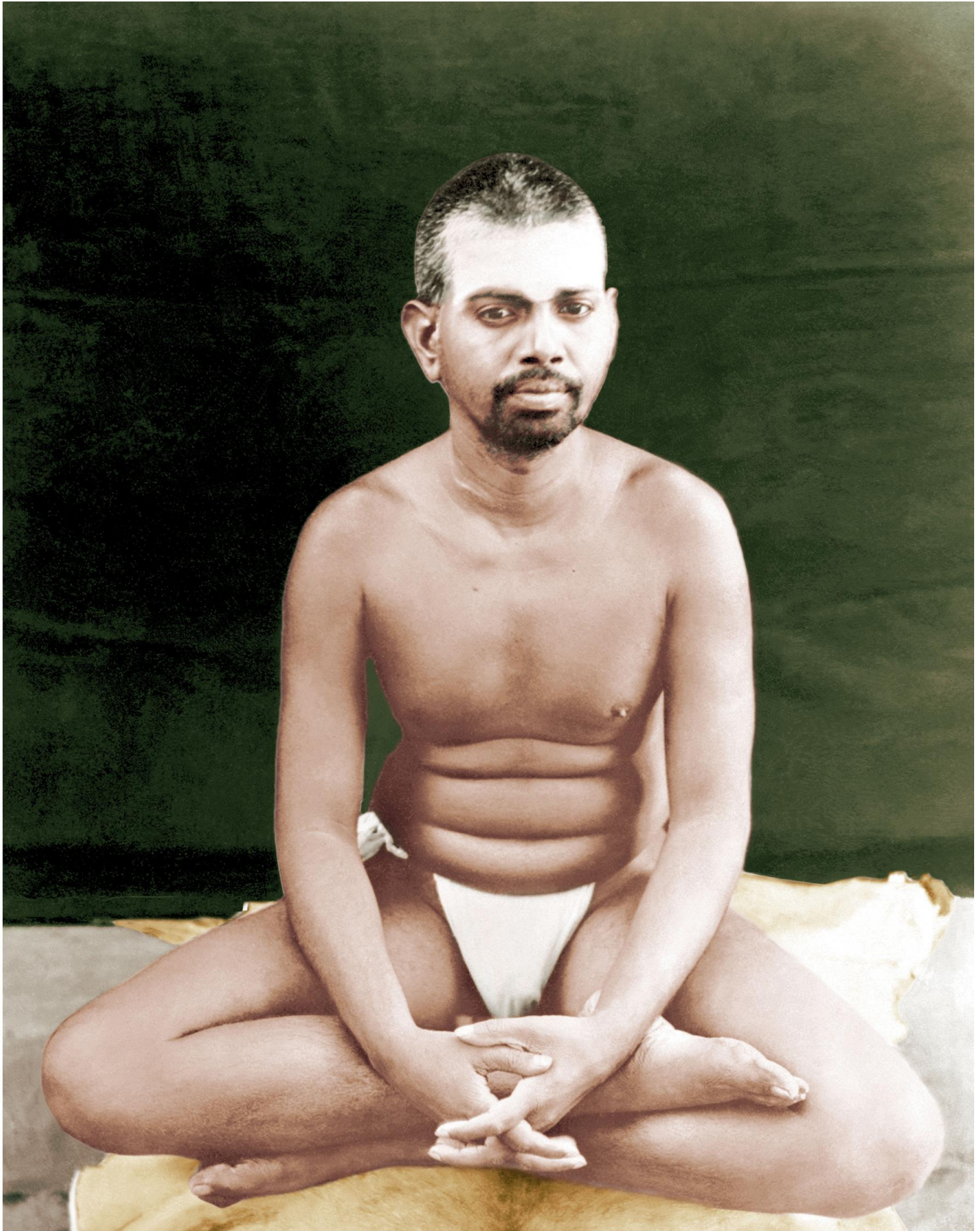


“This [holy] hill, the lodestone of lives, arrests the movements”

When devotees sought spiritual guidance, his inimitable *upadesa* to them invariably was “turn within and be the ‘Inner Silence’ ”. Those who could not grasp the Inner Silence, were initiated through his look – his ‘Glance of Grace’ !



“.....[inside the temple] he was totally absorbed in introversion, rejoicing in the Inner Silence.....”



Sri Bhagavan seated inside the Virupaksha Cave

A Supreme Court judge had this to say about Sri Bhagavan: “ *Anyone can go and sit near him, invited or uninvited. Anyone can partake of the homely meal in the Ashram, whether native or foreigner, high caste or outcast. The Maharshi has not the least tinge in him of caste, creed, colour, race, class, sex or country. He has not only sacrificed all forms of private possession, he has sacrificed even the privacy of time. He is the sublime example of what a Sage ought to be.*”



Sri Bhagavan and Grant Duff

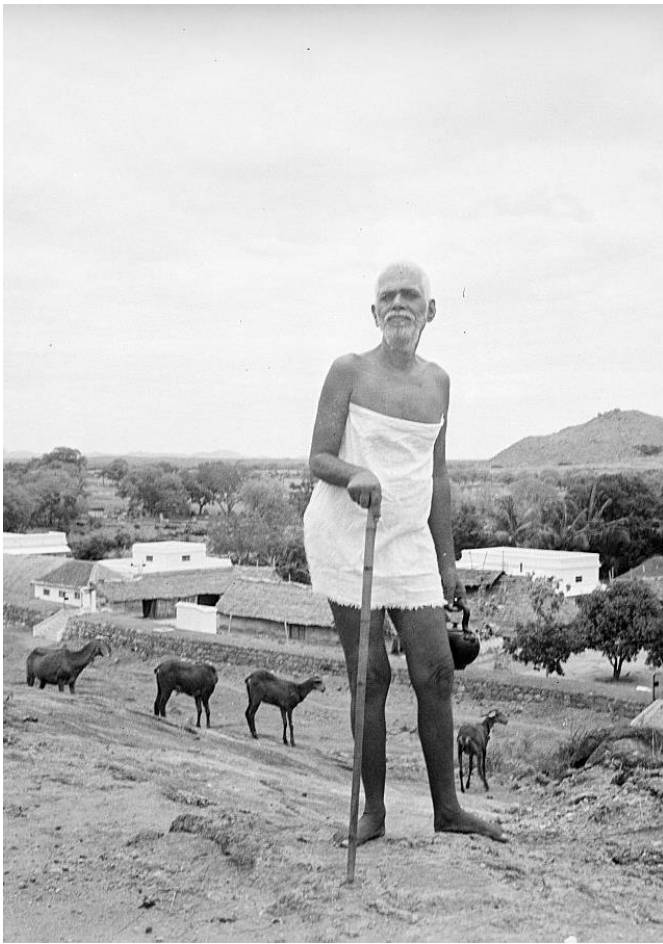
Grant Duff, an aristocratic Englishman's experience is revealing, “*The moment the Maharshi looked at me, I felt he was the ‘Truth’ and the ‘Light’.* It did not take long to see that I was in direct contact with one who has passed beyond boundaries of senses and was indeed already merged in the Absolute of his true Self. Never perhaps in world history was the Supreme Truth – Reality, ‘Sat’ – placed within such easy reach of so vast a multitude.”

Meanwhile, Professor Banning Richardson observed, “*What Jesus the Christ taught two thousand years ago that ‘I am in my Father and my Father is in me. My father and I are one’, is the same as he who teaches today at Arunachala!*”

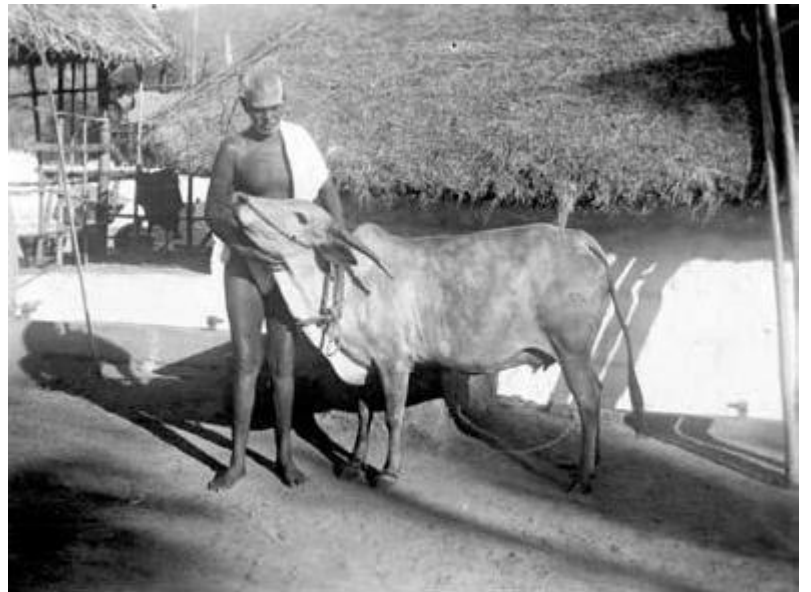
Bhagavan Ramana was and is unique. So too, his life and his teaching was and is unique! He was open to all and available to all – all the 24 hours. He treated anyone, everyone and everything equally. His tremendous compassion and love included humans, birds, animals, plants, trees and even rocks.

The dog Jackie would sit motionless in front of the Maharshi, meditating like all other devotees. He neither barked nor wagged his tail when he was there. He never even sniffed food kept on the stool next to him in front of the Maharshi. Seeing this, the Maharshi himself once remarked: “Jackie is in the state of *samadhi*.”

A monkey once came into the Hall to grab a banana from a big bunch kept in front of the Maharshi. He put his hand on them and looked at the Maharshi, who looked back intently at the monkey. The monkey stayed motionless - in a state of quietude for a long time. When he regained his habitual monkey nature, he grabbed a banana and began to rush out. Sri Bhagavan mildly asked him, “What is the urgency? Why don't you stay quietly in that state? What kingdom are you going to conquer outside?”



Sri Bhagavan with goats up on the Hill



Sri Bhagavan fondling Cow Lakshmi

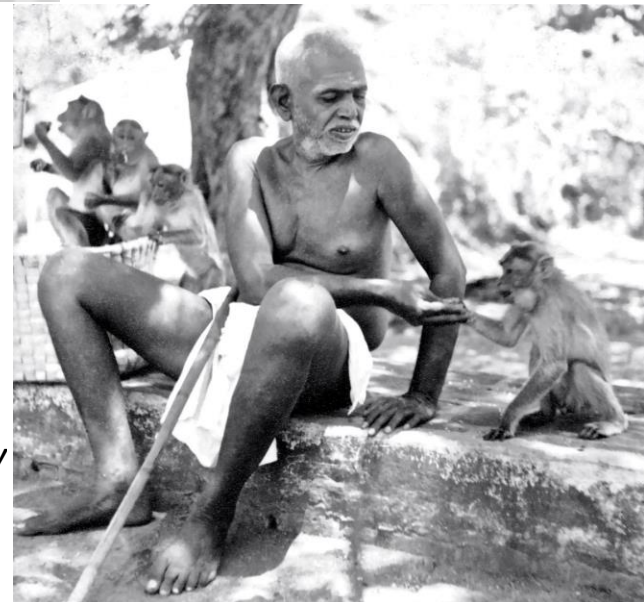


Sri Bhagavan walking with 'Jackie'

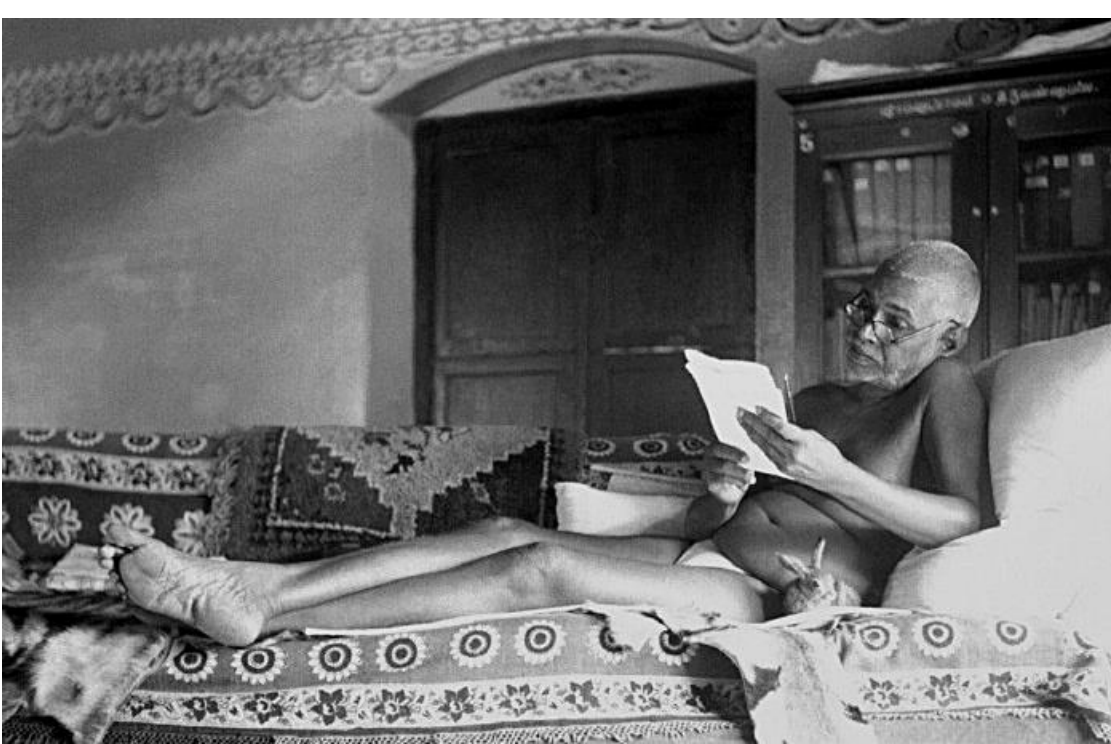
"The elephant and I stayed together in the thousand-pillared mantapam. Out of compassion for me -- his friend -- he has come here." -- Sri Bhagavan.



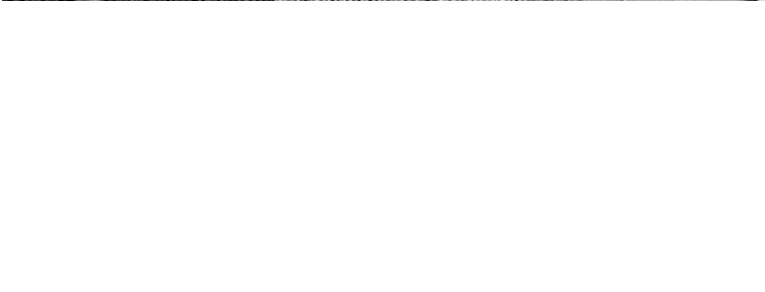
Sri Bhagavan with Cows -- Cow Lakshmi prostrating



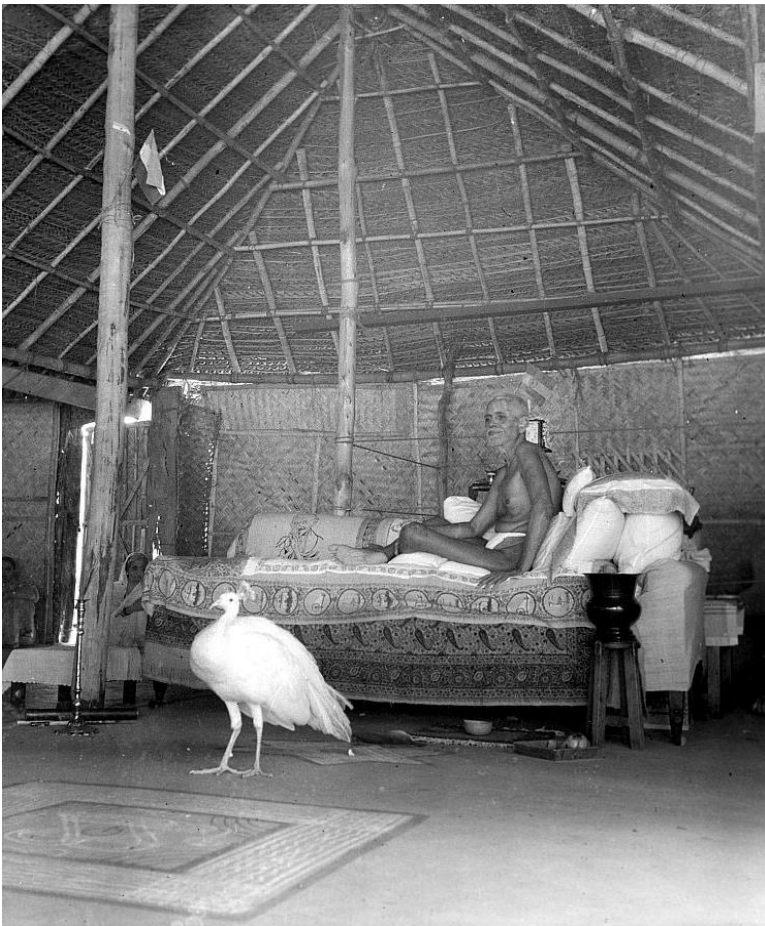
Sri Bhagavan feeding the monkey



A rabbit sitting near Sri Bhagavan



The fortunate baby squirrel nestling in Sri Bhagavan 's palm



Sri Bhagavan blessing the White Peacock

As if praying for the Maharshi's personal attention and sacred touch to attain the highest state of emancipation, a crow waited three whole days on the top of a pole just outside the Hall. When Sri Bhagavan was informed of it, he got up, went near the crow and said, "Oh! You are waiting for me! " He then opened the crow's beak, poured a few drops of water from his *kamandalu* [water pot] and looked at the crow with intense love. The crow opened its eyes and dropped its body in the hands of the Maharshi. Maharshi himself built its tomb, confirming that it had attained Freedom!

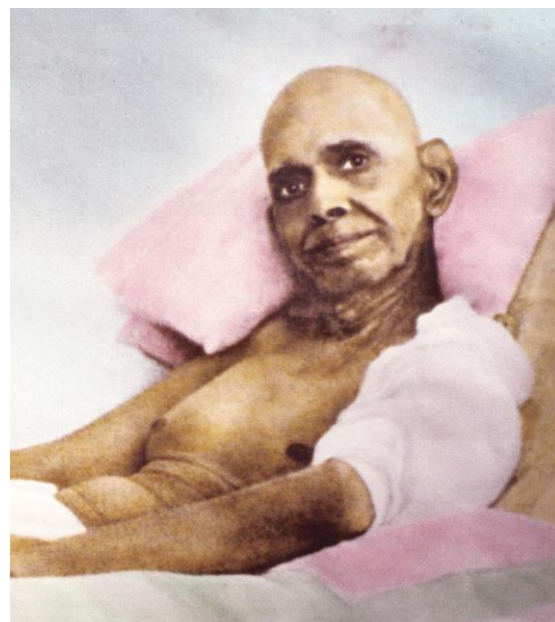
Cow Lakshmi used to come to Sri Bhagavan twice every day – once in the morning and again in the evening. She would ignore everyone else and come straight to Sri Bhagavan – even if there were large crowds around him – and then bend down and lick his feet. The Maharshi used to remark, "Just as all of you prostrate, this cow's way of conveying reverence is through licking my feet!"

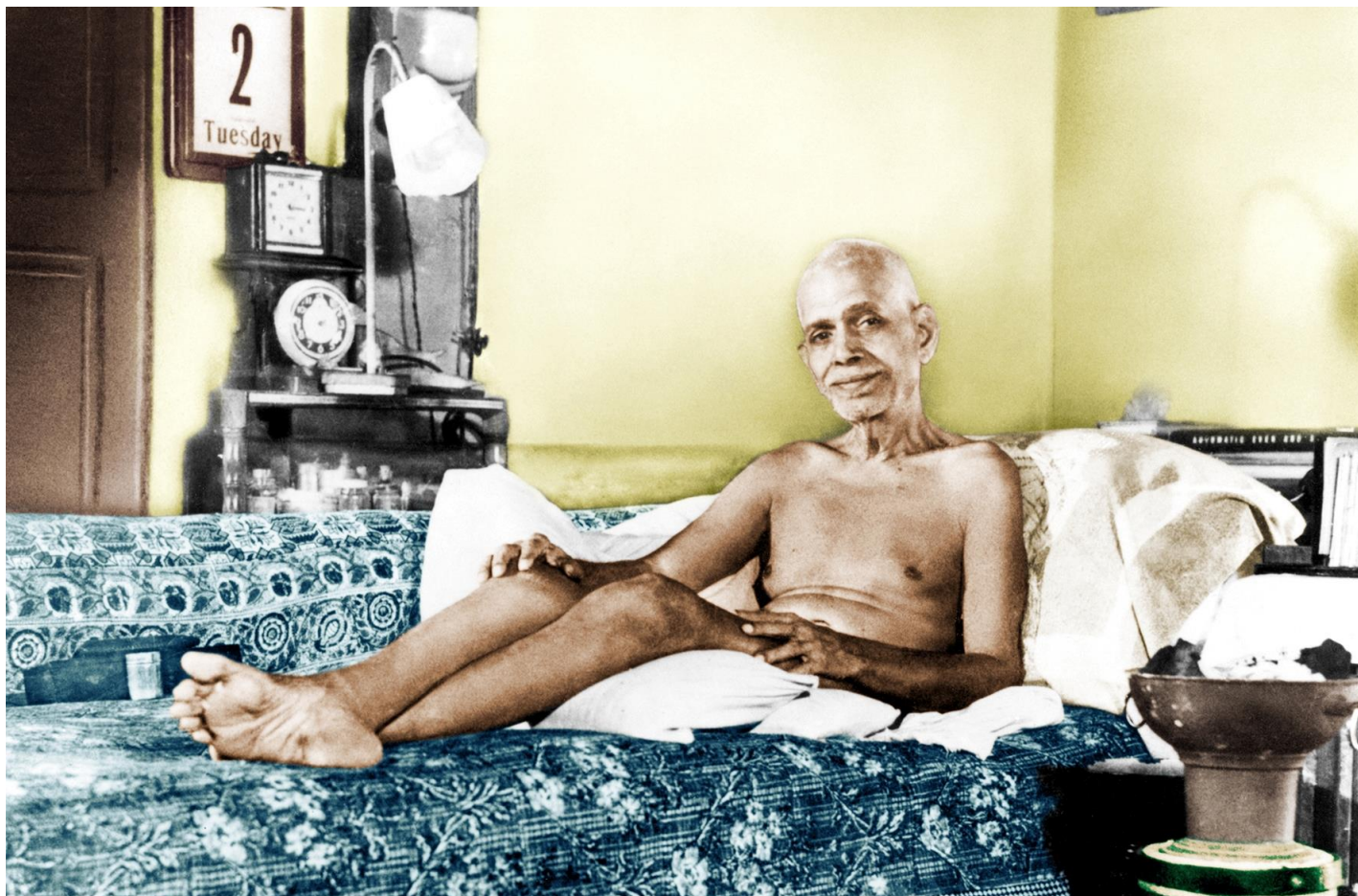
Sri Bhagavan had absolutely no sense of ownership of anything, including his body. When doctors cut off the infected flesh from his cancer affected arm, he too looked on with a detached look, similar to that of the doctors.

When the devotees cried and lamented that he was leaving them all and going away, Bhagavan Ramana, declared, "***Where could I go? I AM HERE !***" He was indicating the 'here' within the Heart of every one of us. On April 14, 1950, the son 'Ramana' merged in the Source from where he came - the Hill of the Holy Fire, Father Arunachala - in the form of light!

The light we call Sri Bhagavan had merged with the Light of lights-***Arunachala Jyothi !***

"Where could I go? I AM HERE !"





The Teaching

“The pure Self is not realized unless the mind subsides. The mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, and the first and foremost of all thoughts is the primal ‘I’-thought. Therefore, only through the enquiry ‘Who Am I ?’ does the mind subside. To keep the mind constantly turned within and to abide thus in the Self is alone Self-Enquiry.

“By steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into THAT to which the ‘I’ refers, and that is verily the Self.

“That which arises in the physical body as ‘I’, is the mind. If one enquires whence this ‘I’-ness first arises, it will be found that it is the Heart.

“Restraint of the out-going mind and its absorption in the Heart is known as introversion. When the mind becomes absorbed in the Heart, the ‘I’ or ego vanishes, and pure Consciousness or Self, which subsists during all the states of the mind, alone remains resplendent. This state, where there is not the slightest trace of the ‘I’-thought, is one’s true Swarupa (true nature). And, that is called Quiescence or Mouna; that is also true Wisdom.

“The Self alone exists; and the Self alone is real. Verily the Self alone is the world, the ‘I’ and God. All that exists is but the manifestation of the Supreme Being.

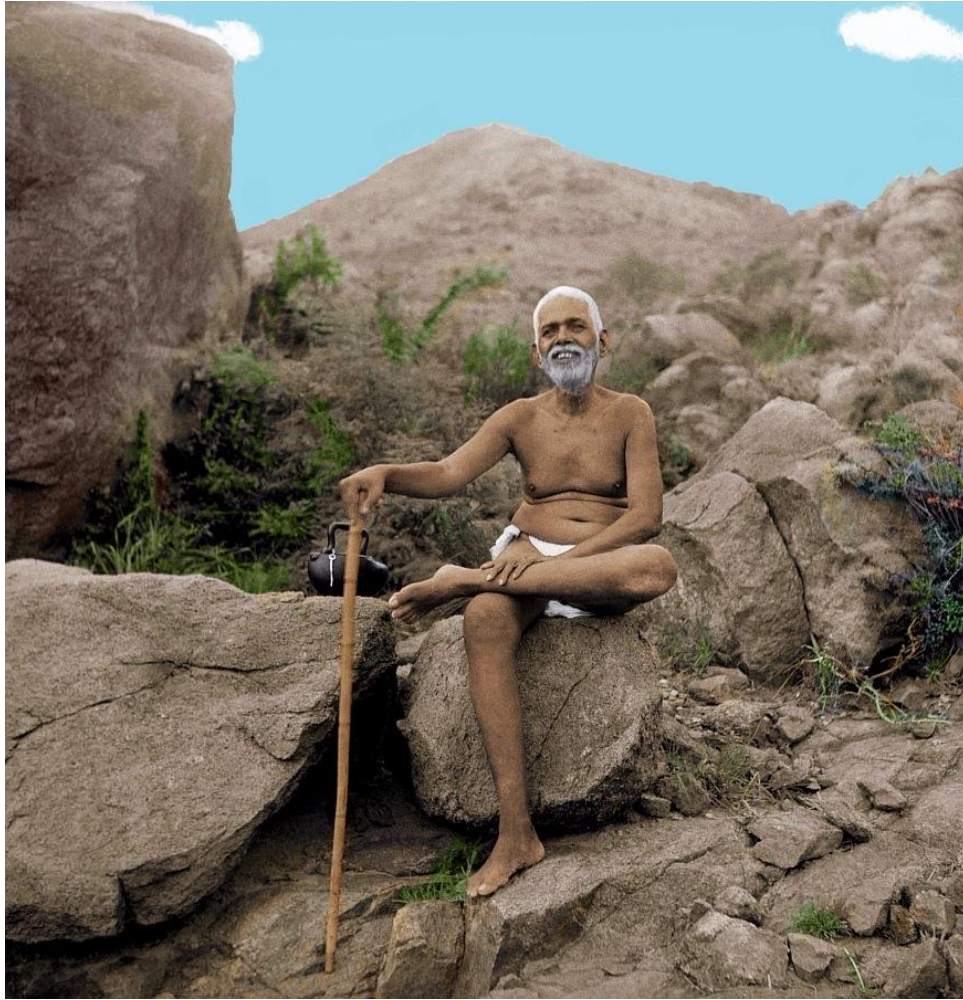
“Firm and disciplined inherence in the Self does verily constitute self-surrender to the Supreme Lord. Let any amount of burden be laid on Him, He doth bear it all.

“That which is Bliss is verily the Self. Bliss and the Self are one and identical. And, THAT alone is real. Not even in one of the countless objects of the world is there anything that can be called happiness. This phenomenal world is nothing but thought. When the mind is free from thought, it enjoys the Bliss of the Self. The mind of the Enlightened One never exists apart from the Self Absolute.

“Likes and dislikes, love and hatred, are equally to be eschewed. It is not proper to let the mind rest often on the objects or affairs of mundane life. If the ego subsides, all else will also subside. The deeper the humility with which we conduct ourselves, the better it is for us. Everything that is offered to others is really an offering to oneself. Not to desire anything extraneous to oneself is Vairaghya or Dispassion. Not to give up one’s hold on the Self is Jnana or Enlightenment. Thus, Vairaghya and Jnana are really one and the same. Pledged to Vairaghya, every aspirant must dive deep into himself and realize the precious Atman, the Self Absolute.

“God and Guru are one. He that has earned the Grace of the Guru shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken. But, the disciple, for his part, should follow the path shown by the Master.”

SRI BHAGAVAN AND ME



I was born far away from Arunachala, on September 19, 1936, at a village in Ramnad district, named '*Kaanaadukaathan*' (meaning, 'The Lord who rules over crematorium'). As a new born baby, I was brought to the presence of Sri Bhagavan. My parents prayed to him to give a name to the baby. Sri Bhagavan said, "He has not given me that trouble because he is born with a name !" I was born on '*Ganesh Chaturthi*' – God Ganesha's birthday ! I was thus named 'Ganesan' by Sri Bhagavan.

In 1938, the family was shifted to Tiruvannamalai. The Ashram arranged a small house for our stay, near the big temple, in a street named '*Aavaarankaattu Theru*' (which also meant crematorium). Even now, I live near "*Yama Lingam*" (crematorium), perhaps, proving the old adage: "The end is contained in the beginning" !

Even before my head and mind started dominating, the search for Truth occupied my Heart, imperceptibly though. Two every-day-things attracted my attention and puzzled me to no end : The first – my eyes, which were so small, could contain the huge Arunachala Hill and the tall temple towers, with ease. “How is this possible ?” I asked myself. The second puzzle was, where did the Hill, temple towers and trees in front of me, disappear when I closed my eyes ? And further, when I opened my eyes again, how and from where did they all reappear ? Therefore, what is the truth – the appearance of the ‘seen’ or its disappearance ?

Later, when I was studying in the elementary school, I had to go through the courtyards of the big Arunachaleswara temple. Every time I looked at the huge towers (more than 120 feet tall), I used to mentally admire how grand they were all ! One day, suddenly for no reason, I squinted my eyes while looking at the tower. Wonder of wonders, there were, then, ‘two’ towers in front of me ! Which of the two towers was true ? Among the two, which one was built seven hundred years ago and which was the one created by the squinting of my eyes ? The search continued.....



Raja Gopuram -- Arunachaleswara Temple Tower

In due course, while treading the spiritual path in search of the Truth, I became aware that it paved the way to one’s birthright for Self-Realisation. I worked hard to obtain the Grace of the Guru, through intense *sadhana*, through sacrifices, through sincere self-erasing surrendered service ! For, I clearly understood that I have to continue to stay in the spiritual search – all the time – to know and be immersed in the essence of Truth !

I confess that my spiritual search from childhood was not to know the truth of the existence of God, but the truth about Truth itself. The verse of Sri Bhagavan in “ Reality in Forty Verses ” (v.20) got implanted in my Heart, very deeply. “To see God as apart from the ‘seer’ is only a mental image, since God is not separate from the ‘seer’. To abide in the poise of the ‘Self ’ [Truth] is the true vision of God.” The more I started reading Sri Bhagavan’s compositions, the more clarity started dawning on me. I realization dawned that to get released from the limitation of mental images in one’s mind, one should go beyond it to its very Source – to the ‘Centre without circumference’. I started feeling deeply, that everyone is God, especially every devotee – old and new !

* * * * *

When I was working in Sri Ramanasramam office, we used to go for a walk in the forest along with Kunju Swami. Often, we would take a detour and step into Annamalai Swami's ashram and bask in his presence. He used to give us ginger tea, which we enjoyed very much. Every time we went, I would prostrate to him. While getting up and I was still in the kneeling position, Annamalai Swami would put his hand on my head, ruffle my hair and then put his head on my head. At that time, I thought that it was his way of greeting me. Even a few years later, when I was there with Anuradha, he did the same thing. Anuradha asked Swami why he was ruffling my hair and putting his head against mine. Annamalai Swami replied : "In 1938, Venkatoo's family was brought to Tiruvannamalai. This Ganesan was a toddler. He had a peculiar habit when he was taken to Sri Bhagavan's Hall. He would climb down from Sri Bhagavan's sister's lap, crawl towards Sri Bhagavan's sofa and try to climb up. Sri Bhagavan's attendant Krishnaswami would stop him and place him back on Sri Bhagavan's sister's lap, saying, "Do not try to establish any special family relationship here."



'Child' Ganesan



One of the earliest group photos of Old Devotees with Sri Bhagavan (Annamalai Swami holds 'Baby' Ganesan in his hands)

One day, Sri Bhagavan had sent Krishnaswami away on some errand. This baby Ganesan very quickly crawled up to the sofa and climbed on it. To prevent him from falling off the sofa, Sri Bhagavan pressed baby Ganesan down into the sofa with his left foot, and placing his right foot on his crown, ruffled his hair. Sri Bhagavan exclaimed, “All these days, his repeated attempts to climb up on the sofa were foiled. Today, there was no one to abort his efforts. So, finally he succeeded !” Sri Bhagavan thus blessed baby Ganesan, profusely. My Master’s holy foot is there, Anuradha. I put my head not on Ganesan’s head – I am putting my head on my Master’s Holy Foot ! ”

One day, when I was three years old, I went and prostrated to Sri Bhagavan. When I got up, Sri Bhagavan said, “Ganesa ! Go, your Noye is seated there. Go, sit on her lap.” I ran joyfully towards the elderly American lady and happily clambered on to her lap. She was Eleanor Pauline Noye. Much later, I came to know that Noye was all the time shedding tears in the presence of Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan might have wanted to distract her by making me sit on her lap. This was not the only incident where Sri Bhagavan’s Grace linked me to her.



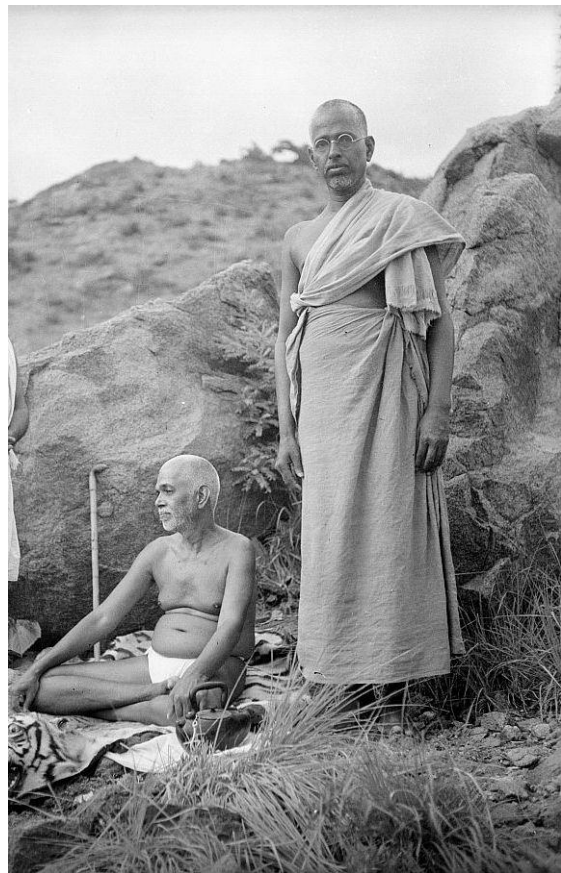
Eleanor Pauline Noye offering obeisance

The same year, I went one day into the dining hall when Sri Bhagavan and the devotees were seated for lunch. Heading straight for Eleanor Pauline Noye, I insisted on eating from her leaf plate. The cooks and several of the seated devotees were horrified – steeped as they were in orthodoxy. For them, even the thought of a *Brahmin* child sharing food from the plate of a Westerner was abhorrent. They came running to save me from this unthinkable act of pollution ! Adamant on having my way, I started throwing a tantrum and creating a scene. Sri Bhagavan’s attention was drawn to the whole drama. With a single look, he took in what was taking place and advised the cooks,

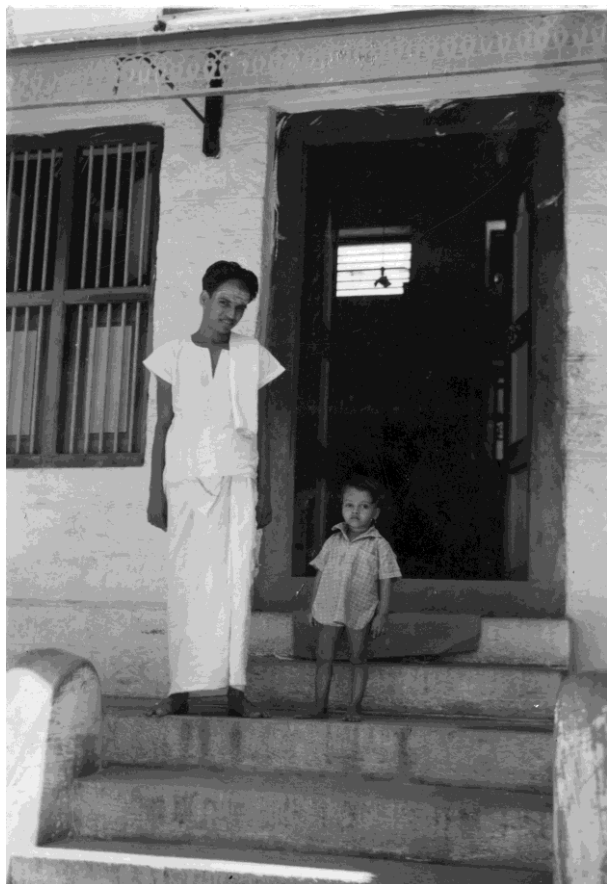
“Bring a plate of food with a spoon in it and show it to the child. He will come along with you. His insistence is not to eat from her plate. Since Ganesan has never seen anybody eat with a spoon, he too wants to eat with one !” The cooks did as Sri Bhagavan suggested and I followed them like a happy puppy. Sri Bhagavan looked at me and remarked, “See, your wish is fulfilled !” Sri Bhagavan then turned to the cooks and the others and said, “And, your problem too is solved !”

I was very short until adolescence. People used to call me “*Kuttai*” (meaning, ‘Shortie’ in Tamil). There would be a hundred people eating in the Ashram dining hall, in the presence of Sri Bhagavan. Everyone would be served first and Sri Bhagavan would be served last. He used to pay much attention to the food servers. I wanted Sri Bhagavan to look at me with the same attention. So, I thought that if I too served food, Sri Bhagavan would give me the same attention.

I went inside the kitchen and said, “I want to serve food !” All the cooks were elderly widows, and they were all very fond of children – especially me, because I moved very closely with Sri Bhagavan, whenever and wherever he walked. The vessels were so big, and I was so short, the cooks restrained me saying, “No, no, no. That’s only for grown up people, not for children. You go and sit with Sri Bhagavan and eat.” When they refused, I started crying out loud and



throwing a *Chinna Swami : totally dedicated to Sri Bhagavan’s service* tantrum.



Father, T.N. Venkatraman and me : in front of old Ashram Office

Sri Bhagavan heard this, looked up as if to enquire, “What is happening ?” One of the cooks told him, “Our baby Ganesan is throwing a tantrum.” “What ? What does he want ?” “He insists that he would serve food.” “What is wrong with that ?” “Bhagavan ! He is so small ! All our vessels are bigger than him !” “That’s your problem, not his. Put salt and a small spoon in a cup, give it to Ganesan and send him to me !”

So, they did. I felt very proud. I came to Sri Bhagavan. He looked at me and asked, “You want to serve ?” I said, “Yes, Bhagavan ! I want to serve.” Of course, what I wanted was his attention. “Do you know how to serve ?” Sri Bhagavan asked me. I replied, “No.” “Do you know why you want to serve ?” “No.” “Do you

know where to serve ?” I said, “No.” Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, “I will teach you.” He said, “Do you know what is in the cup ?” “That I know, Bhagavan ! It is salt !” I said very proudly. “Do you know how much to serve ?” “No, that too I don’t know,” I said, rather ashamed. He said, “Take some in the spoon. No, no not that much ! Aah, that’s it ! That’s it. Do you know where to serve it ?” “No, Bhagavan.” “Put it on the banana leaf on the top left hand corner.” I was very happy because Sri Bhagavan was paying so much attention to me. I immediately put the salt on his leaf, just as he instructed. “It doesn’t matter today”, he said, “but, you should serve this leaf last !”

I looked at all the others in the big dining hall. Then, I went and served them. And, when I looked back, I was thrilled – Sri Bhagavan’s attention was on me !

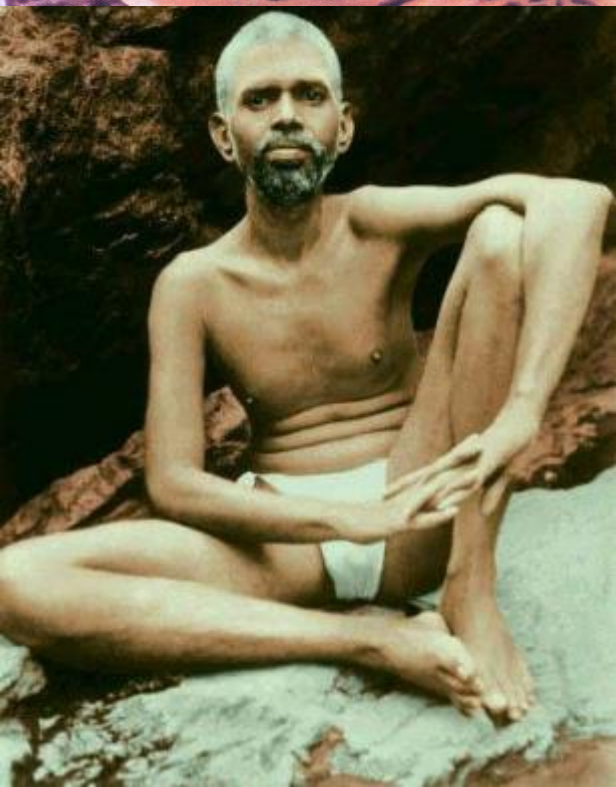
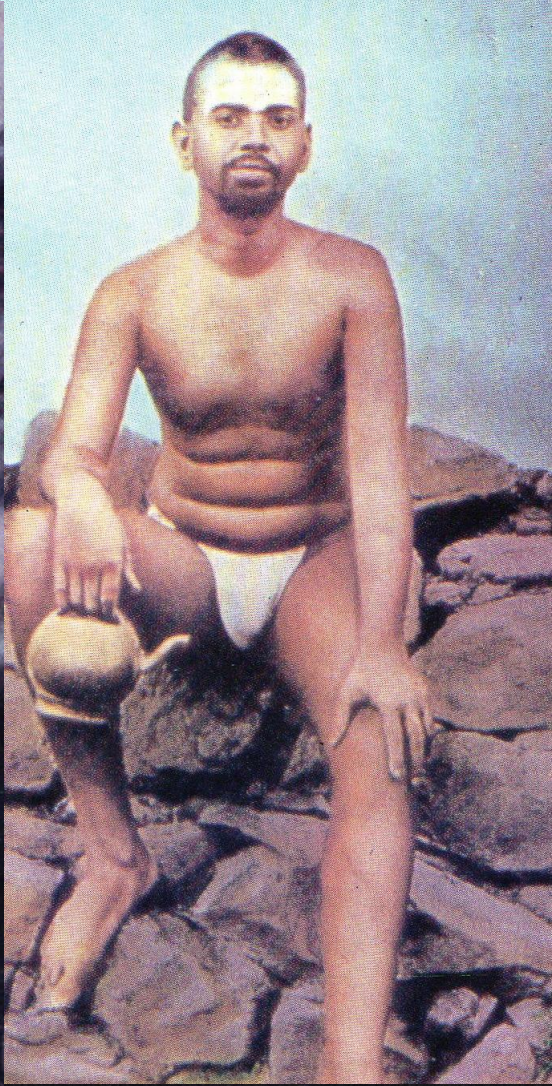
Chinna Swami (Sri Bhagavan’s younger brother and the *Sarvadhikari* -- Sole Manager of the Ashram) -- my grandfather, had always been very kind to me. He would brush my teeth in the early morning (whenever I happened to stay back and sleep at the Ashram), take me to Sri Bhagavan at the Hall and make me prostrate before him, saying, “Here is *Bhagavan* – our God”. I am deeply grateful to him for taking me to Sri Bhagavan’s sacred presence – the importance of which I did not understand then – but, which I now gratefully remember.

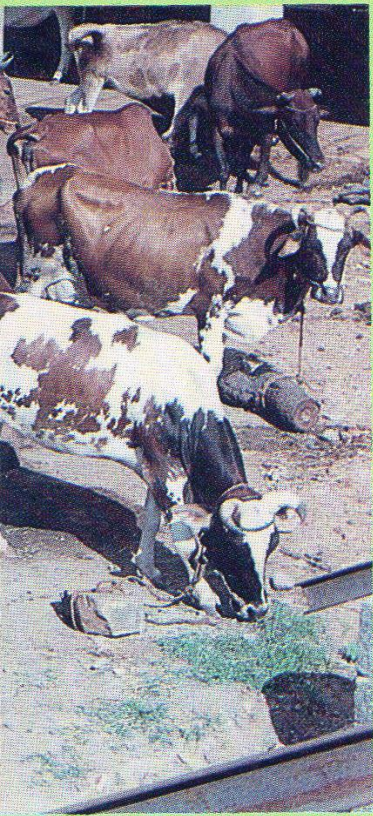


‘Boy’ Ganesan with Sri Bhagavan

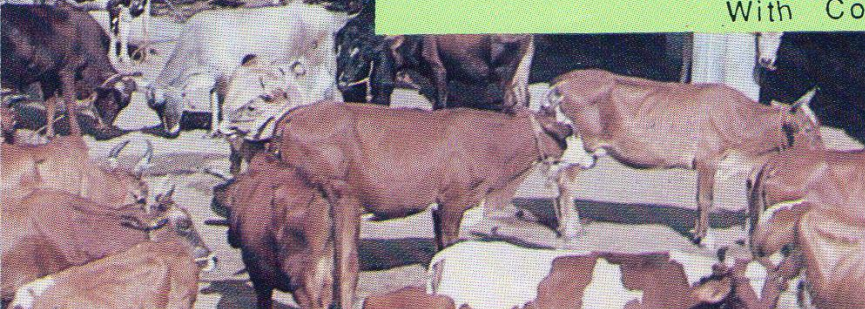
When I was four or five years old, I used to run away from our home in town and walk to the Ashram, all alone, in the night. In those days, the streets were dark and desolate. The first time I did this, Chinna Swami was taken aback. He asked me, “Why did you come ?” I replied, “I didn’t agree with my father; so, I walked away.” He immediately took me to Sri Bhagavan and said, “He has walked all the way alone without fear.” He hastened to add, “I have already sent a messenger to his father.”

Sri Bhagavan looked at me and gave a mischievous smile. Chinna Swami took me back to the office wherein he used to sleep on a comfortable bed and offered it to me. “Why did Bhagavan smile at me ?” I asked. “When you were two years old, you got into an empty bullock cart which was yoked to a bull. Its driver too wasn’t around. Startled by a visitor suddenly opening an umbrella, the bull sped away with the cart into the town. We frantically searched for you in the Ashram, but you could not be found.





With Cow Lakshmi



We went to Sri Bhagavan and informed him that you were missing. Sri Bhagavan said, “What can we do ? Running away from home is built into our family !” “What did Bhagavan mean by that ?” I asked, puzzled. “Bhagavan’s father had an elder brother called Venkatesa Iyer. He had also run away from home on a spiritual quest,” Chinna Swami informed me.

We did not have any toys at the Ashram. One day, an American visitor sent a hundred different beautiful toys requesting they be distributed among the children in Sri Bhagavan’s presence. Chinna Swami called me and said, “Go to the Hall and choose a toy now. In a few minutes all the other children are going to come. Whichever toy you like, you tell Bhagavan.” So I went in. Only Sri Bhagavan and I were there. I was so short and my eyes were so wide. I had never seen so many toys in my life ! My eyes went straight to an airplane, something I had never seen before. I used to occasionally see some small tiny thing in the sky making a lot of noise, but I didn’t know what it was. This airplane was big, not really a toy, it was made to scale.

Sri Bhagavan called me, “Ganesa, come ! Some American has sent all these toys. Show me the toy you like and take it. But remember, you can choose only one !” I ran and picked up that airplane. “You like that ?” “Yes, Bhagavan ! I like it.” I was so excited. Sri Bhagavan said, “Come, bring it to me.” I went to where he was seated. He said, “Do you know what an airplane is ?” I said, “I don’t know, Bhagavan.” “See ! This is the propeller,” and he touched the propeller to make it spin. “We start this first. These are the wheels; the plane will be running along on them, and then, zoom !” My excitement and joy were increasing. He said, “ Look at this ! These are all the passengers !” He pointed through the window, “And, this man here is the pilot !”

Sri Bhagavan gave me joy by simply explaining a toy airplane. I can never forget this; even now I can see how he became me and expressed my joy. It’s so beautiful ! At that moment Sri Bhagavan became me ! I was in such tremendous excitement, and I could see the same thing in him. A *Jnani* – a realized Sage – is like a mirror. I was in heaven ! Then, bringing me back to earth, Sri Bhagavan concluded, “Don’t break it. Keep it safely !”

To live with a realized Sage is the most natural way of living. It is something we have forgotten. We fill our lives with worries, plans, desires, and they all disturb us. Realized Sages like Sri Bhagavan, being established in that inner Truth, are always happy. And, they make everyone else happy. Like a mirror, they reflect what you are – both the Truth and the untruth. If you are misled by *vasanas* (latent tendencies), they point it out, “This is your *vasana* – the untruth – come back to the Truth !”

During the life time of Sri Bhagavan, there were only two huge functions – one, his birthday celebrations [‘***Ramana Jayanthi*** ’] and the other, ‘***Maha Puja***’ [Mother Alagammal Day] when thatched sheds would be erected on vantage positions. Underneath these vast sheds, mounds of soft sand would be heaped, to be spread evenly on the previous day of the function. I was six or seven years old and was very fond of swinging energetically on the poles supporting the sheds. The thrill was in swinging oneself as high as one could and then let go of the pole to land on the soft heaped up sand below. Many children of devotees and visitors would wait for me to start the proceedings !



Sri Bhagavan with bandages

One day, while trying to land, I overshot the sand mound, and fell on the hard ground. Consequently, I badly fractured my right upper arm. It was so severe that the bone protruded. The pain was excruciating. Everyone gathered around. But I did not allow anyone to come near me – especially, the Ashram Doctor, Dr.Shiva Rao. There was a great commotion and it happened opposite to Sri Bhagavan’s Hall. I was adamant that I should be taken only to Sri Bhagavan’s presence. By that time, Ashram authorities found out that the village bone-setter was also there on his usual visit to have Sri Bhagavan’s *darshan*.

They took me inside the Hall. Sri Bhagavan was alone. I was crying aloud out of pain. Sri Bhagavan called me near him and looked at the protruding bone. He consoled me, “See ! I also fell down and broke my collar bone while trying to save a squirrel from an attacking dog. It was very painful. This bone-setter from the nearby village – Valluvagai – applied a paste on the affected shoulder and I felt a soothing chillness around the broken bone. He gently, but suddenly, pushed the broken bone into position. Immediately, the pain got reduced and within a day the pain was gone, though the discomfort of having the arm in a sling was there ! He is a very good gentleman. Let him set your bone. You too will not have any pain then. Everything will be alright.”

Sri Bhagavan’s consoling words persuaded me to agree. The bone-setter smilingly held my arm gently in his hands. He diverted me saying, “Ganesa ! See, Bhagavan is showing you something.” When my attention and my eyes were turned to Sri Bhagavan seated behind me, I felt a momentary shock of enormous pain. The bone-setter had put the protruding bone back to its position. He then quickly applied a soothing paste on it and

dressed it up. Amazed, I turned again to Sri Bhagavan, “What you said is true, Bhagavan ! The pain is not affecting me. I feel the coolness of the paste taking away the pain !” After a few days, my arm became alright.

But, next year too, I broke the other arm. Then, almost like clockwork, the very next year, I broke my arm again – for the third time. Every time the same village bone-setter would make my arm perfectly alright. The beauty of all those occurrences was, after this, any day I went and prostrated to Sri Bhagavan, he would ask me, “So, which arm did you break today !”

In fact, this whole sequence of events that took place in front of Sri Bhagavan was truly a blessing. Not only pain does not affect me, but I have never broken a bone since then !

Between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Sri Bhagavan’s devotees refrained from entering into the Hall to give Sri Bhagavan a little time to relax and be alone. At least, that was what the devotees thought ! Sri Bhagavan on the other hand, took those two hours to keep himself busy by feeding the squirrels ! Once, I happened to see that remarkable spectacle, through the window. I was spell bound ! After that, whenever I happened to be at the Ashram, I never missed the golden opportunity of witnessing the beauty of the Master interacting with his chosen children – nearly fifty pious squirrels !

Offerings made to Sri Bhagavan were kept on a stool in front of him. He seldom looked at them, except on two occasions : one was when ‘mountain’ bananas were offered and the other was when cashew nuts were offered. On Such occasions, Sri Bhagavan would pointedly request the attendant to keep them next to him. Otherwise, all offerings would be sent to the Ashram store-house. The reason behind this, was that Cow Lakshmi would eat only one variety of plantain fruits, called ‘mountain’ bananas, while the squirrels would eat only cashew nuts and no other nuts !

After lunch, Sri Bhagavan would take a long walk from the Ashram dining hall to the next compound ‘**Palakothu**’, every day. Devotees had grown banyan trees on the way, to give shade to Sri Bhagavan. They had grown to six or seven feet, and were still tender. For us boys, it was a childish adventure to climb up the trees, hit it with a stone and get excited to see milky sap oozing out. One day, Sri Bhagavan happened to be walking underneath and I was the only one boy up on a tree. I was so excited to see the milk ooze out, that I did not notice Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan looked at me with visible irritation and ordered me to climb down.



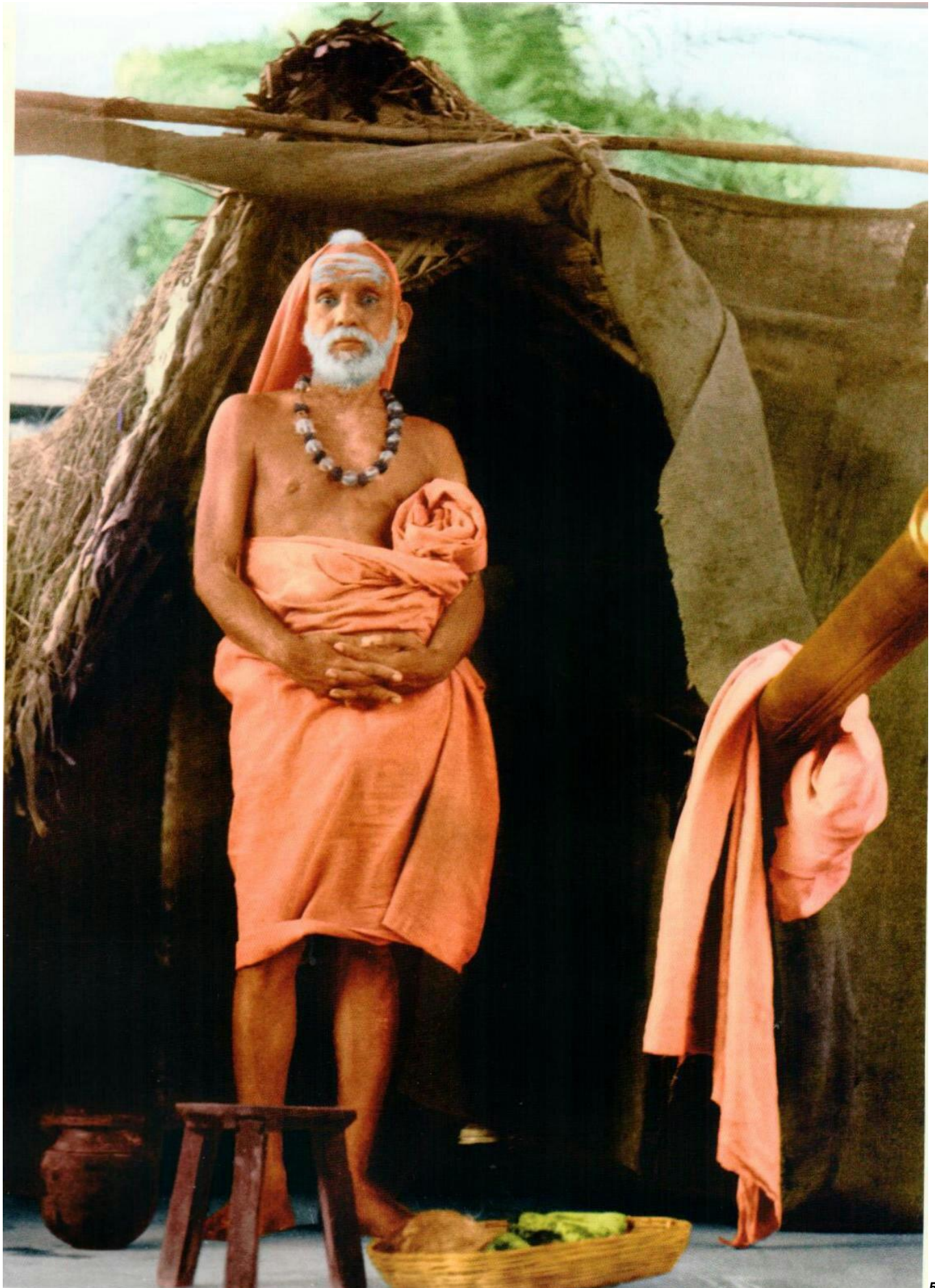
“If somebody hits your body and blood oozes out, how would you feel? Will you not feel pain ? Will not the tree similarly, experience pain when you hit it with a stone like that ? Should you not be as considerate to the tree as you are considerate to your own body ?” These words of Sri Bhagavan brought about a marked change in my attitude towards trees. Ever since, I have great respect for trees and plants.

Earlier, I have shared with you of how I came to live permanently at the Ashram from 1959 ! Obviously the Physical presence of Sri Bhagavan was not there, yet his assurance, “***Where could I go ? I AM here !***” was my strongest support to pursue my spiritual *sadhana* . The Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan were of tremendous help to me, in every step that I took.

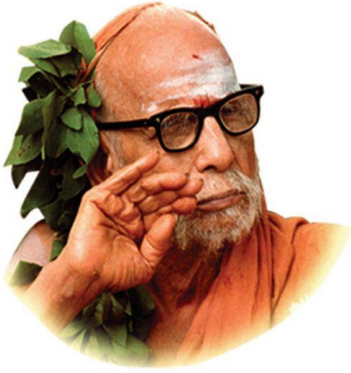
[In the following pages, I would be sharing with you the details of how the Old Devotees pointedly guided me, by even taking me to the Sages and Saints, who moulded my spiritual life !]



“Should you not be considerate to the trees as you are considerate to your own body ?” -- Sri Bhagavan



KANCHI PARAMACHARYA



Life

Chandrashekarendra Saraswati Swami (popularly known as ‘Kanchi Paramacharya’) was born as Swaminathan, on 20th, May 1894 in the town of Viluppuram, Tamil Nadu. He was born to a devout Brahmin couple, Subramania Shastri and Mahalakshmi Ammal, as their second son.

Swaminathan’s brilliance prompted Shastri to home school him until the age of eight. He also trained the boy in music at a very young age. Swaminathan was capable of grasping and remembering anything that he saw or heard just once. When his father was stationed at Tindivanam, he was enrolled into second form at Arcot American Mission High School. Swaminathan excelled in studies, coming first in the class, first in all exams in every grade, won all trophies in every annual day celebrations. He even got the first prize in learning the *Bible*.

In 1906, Swaminathan’s father, took his family with him to obtain the *darshan* of the then Shankaracharya, the 66th *Peetadhipathi* of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. The family stayed on for two days to get the benefit of Swami’s continued *darshan*. During this occasion, the Acharya interacted closely with young Swaminathan and asked him many questions. Pleased with the young boy’s brilliance and attractive personality, the Acharya was heard commenting: “He will turn out to be a *Maha Purusha*.” Hearing this, his father’s pleasure knew no bounds. He took leave from the Acharya and returned to Tindivanam where he was stationed for work. The Acharya had, meanwhile, requested Subramania Shastri to bring Swaminathan frequently to the Mutt. As per his request, Shastri took his son several times to get Acharya’s *darshan*. During these frequent meetings, the Grace of the Guru started flowing in full abundance over young Swaminathan.

One day, Swaminathan was found missing from his house in Tindivanam. His parents were very anxious and searched everywhere. But he was nowhere to be found. Two days later, a messenger arrived from the Acharya's camp which was five miles away. He conveyed the news that Swaminathan had come there for Acharya's *darshan* on his own, and he was safe. He added that the Acharya had sent him to convey this message to the parents.

In the first week of February in 1907, Subramania Shastri's house received a telegram from the Mutt camp. The telegram requested Shastri to come to the Mutt immediately with Swaminathan. At the time that the telegram was sent to Tindivanam, the Acharya's health was in decline. Believing that his time was limited, the Acharya had sent the summons to Tindivanam with the intention of installing Swaminathan as the next Acharya.

An excerpt of how he became the 68th pontiff was best told by Acharya himself and published in '*Bhavan's Journal*', Bombay: "In the beginning of the year 1907, when I was studying in a Christian Mission School at Tindivanam, I heard one day that the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam who was amidst us in our town in the previous year, attained *siddhi* at Kalavai, a village about ten miles from Arcot and 25 miles from Kanchipuram. Information was received that a maternal cousin of mine who, after some study in *Rig Veda*, had joined the camp of the Acharya offering his services to him, was installed on the *Peetam*.

"He was the only son of the widowed and destitute sister of my mother and there was not a soul in the camp to console her. My mother with myself and other children, started to Kalavai to console her sister on her son assuming *sannyas* ashram. We travelled by rail to Kanchipuram, and halted at the Shankaracharya Mutt there. I had my ablutions at the *Kumara-koshta Tirtha*. A carriage of the Mutt had arrived there from Kalavai with persons to buy articles for the *Maha Pooja* on the 10th day after the passing away of the late Acharya. But one of them, a hereditary *maistri* (mason) of the Mutt, asked me to accompany him. A separate cart was engaged for the rest of the family to follow me.

The young ascetic Paramacharya



“During our journey, the *maistri* hinted to me that I might not return home and that the rest of my life might have to be spent in the Mutt itself. At first I thought that my elder cousin having become the head of the Mutt, it might have been his wish that I was to live with him. I was then only 13 years of age and so I wondered as to what use I might be to him in the institution.

“But the *maistri* gradually began to clarify as miles rolled on, that the Acharya, my cousin in the *poorvashram* had fever which developed into delirium and that was why I was being separated from the family to be quickly taken to Kalavai. He told me that he was commissioned to go to Tindivanam and fetch me, but he was able to meet me at Kanchipuram itself. I was stunned by this unexpected turn of events. I lay in a kneeling posture in the cart itself, shocked as I was, repeating ‘*Rama Rama*’ - the only spiritual prayer I knew - during the rest of the journey.

“My mother and the other children came some time later only to find that instead of her mission of consoling her sister, she herself was placed in the state of having to be consoled by someone else.

“My robes of *sannyas* were not the result of any renunciation on my part, nor had I the advantage of living under a Guru for any length of time. I was surrounded from the very first day of *sannyas* by all the comforts and responsibilities of a gorgeous court.”



... the ‘young’ Swami in the process of ‘learning’ ...

In the years 1909 and 1910, the Mutt appointed scholars who were engaged to teach and train Swami in Sanskrit works and *Vedic* studies. The learned and the academicians of the day were surprised at the brilliance and sharpness of Swamiji’s intellect.

The method of schooling given to the Swami was very unique. Ordinary folks treat their teachers with respect and devotion and learn from them. However, the scholars who taught Swami would pay their respects and devotion to him before and after their lessons! Some of the subjects learnt by Swami included arts, *vyakaranam*, *tharka shastra*, *vedantha*, *meemamsa*, etc.

Swami, on top of learning all these arts, also learnt languages like Marathi and French. During what little free time he had, he got Tamil scholars to train him in Tamil grammar and literature. He continued to research into *Thevaram*, *Thiruvachakam*, *Periya Puranam*, *Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam* and *Thirukural*.

Swami used to take walks in the sand dunes in the middle of Kaveri and enjoy the natural beauty, and sometimes get absorbed in meditating in solitude in the beautiful surroundings. Swami liked to take photographs of picturesque landscapes. In those days, there used to be a person who would follow Swami with a camera. Swami would order him randomly to take pictures of certain scenes. As he was familiar with the intricacies of photography, he would give suggestions and tips to photographers while taking pictures. Swami also became well versed in mathematics, astrology and astronomy. Swami was also attracted to learn Vaishnavite scriptures including *Thiruvaimozhi*.

The young Shankaracharya strode this earth as an authentic *Jagadguru*, making his devotees at home and abroad, from Kailash and Kasi in the North to Kanyakumari in the South marvel at the mastery, the self-assurance, the humility, the dedication and self-regulating rigour of the young *sannyasin*. He journeyed rapidly across the country as Adi Shankara had done, mostly on foot, practising a rigorous personal *tapas* and in a spirit of brooding meditateness.

A unique episode stands out in his life of Himalayan like achievement in the field of the spirit:



Paul Brunton

When the author of *A Search in Secret India* met Paramacharya first at Chinglepet and sought help in his explorations of the mind and heart of the real India, he was asked to go to Tiruvannamalai and meet Bhagavan Sri Ramana who was a shining example of Self-Realization. In this account, Paul Brunton relates how the sage guided the seeker to the "*Maharishhee*":

Paul Brunton: "I look at him in silence. This short man is clad in the ochre coloured robe of a monk and leans his weight on a friar's staff. I have been told that he is on the right side of forty, hence I am surprised to find his hair quite grey."

“His noble face, pictured in grey and brown, takes an honoured place in the long portrait gallery of my memory. That elusive element which the French aptly term spiritual is present in this face. His expression is modest and mild, the large dark eyes being extraordinarily tranquil and beautiful. The nose is short, straight and classically regular. There is a rugged little beard on his chin, and the gravity of his mouth is most noticeable. Such a face might have belonged to one of the saints who graced the Christian Church during the Middle Ages, except that this one possesses the added quality of intellectuality. I suppose we of the practical West would say that he has the eyes of a dreamer. Somehow, I feel in an inexplicable way that there is something more than mere dreams behind those heavy lids.

“I broach the matter of my quest and His Holiness questions me about the different yogis or holy men I have so far met. After that, I frankly tell him: ‘I would like to meet someone who has high attainments in yoga and can give some sort of proof or demonstration of them. There are many of your holy men who can only give one more talk when they are asked for this proof. Am I asking too much.?’

“The tranquil eyes meet mine. There is a pause for a whole minute. His Holiness fingers his beard. ‘If you are seeking initiation into real yoga of the higher kind, then you are not seeking too much. Your earnestness will help you, while I can perceive the strength of your determination; but a light is beginning to awaken within you which will guide you to what you want, without doubt.’

“I am not sure whether I correctly understand him. ‘So far I have depended on myself for guidance. Even some of your ancient sages say that there is no other god than that which is within ourselves,’ I hazard.

“And the answer swiftly comes: ‘God is everywhere. How can one limit Him to one's own self? He supports the entire universe.’

“I feel that I am getting out of my depth and immediately turn the talk away from this semi-theological strain. ‘What is the most practical course for me to take?’

“Go on with your travels. When you have finished them, think of the various Yogis and holy men you have met; then pick out the one who makes most appeal to you. Return to him, and he will surely bestow the initiation upon you.

“I look at his calm profile and admire its singular serenity. ‘But suppose, Your Holiness, that none of them makes sufficient appeal to me. What then?’

“In that case you will have to go on alone until God Himself initiates you. Practise meditation regularly; contemplate the higher things with love in your heart; think often of

soul and that will help to bring you to it. The best time to practise is the hour of waking; the next best time is the hour of twilight. The world is calmer at those times and will disturb your meditations less.

“He gazes benevolently at me. I begin to envy the saintly peace which dwells on his bearded face. Surely, his heart has never known the devastating upheavals which have scarred mine? I am stirred to ask him impulsively: ‘If I fail, may I then turn to you for assistance?’

“Shankaracharya gently shakes his head. ‘I am at the head of a public institution, a man whose time no longer belongs to himself. My activities demand almost all my time. For years, I have spent only three hours in sleep each night. How can I take personal pupils? You must find a master who devotes his time to them.’

“ ‘But I am told that real masters are rare, and that a European is unlikely to find them.’ He nods his assent to my statement, but adds: ‘Truth exists. It can be found.’

“ ‘Can you not direct me to such a master, one who you know is competent to give me proofs of the reality of higher Yoga?’ His Holiness does not reply till after an interval of protracted silence. ‘Yes. I know of only two masters in India who could give you what you wish. One of them lives in Benares, hidden away in a large house, which is itself hidden among spacious grounds. Few people are permitted to obtain access to him; certainly, no European has yet been able to intrude upon his seclusion. I could send you to him, but I fear that he may refuse to admit a European.’

“ ‘And the other?’ My interest is strangely stirred. ‘The other man lives in the interior, farther south. I visited him once and know him to be a high master. I recommend that you go to him.’

“ ‘Who is he?’

“ ‘He is called the ‘*Maharishiee*’. I have not met him, but know him to be a high Master. Shall I provide you with full instructions, so that you may discover him?’

A picture flashes suddenly before my mind's eye. I see the yellow-robed friar, who has vainly persuaded me to accompany him to his teacher. I hear him murmuring the name of a hill. It is: ‘The Hill of the Holy Beacon.’

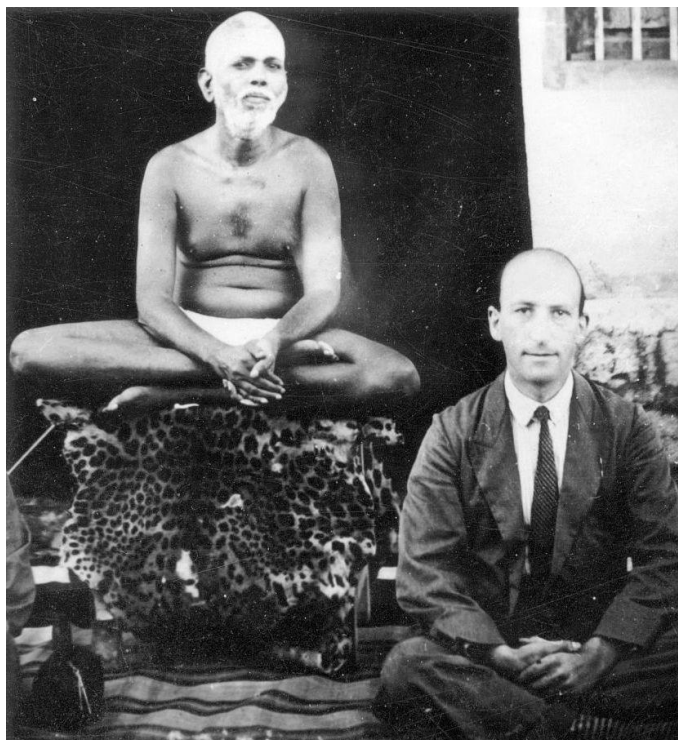
“ ‘Many thanks, Your Holiness,’ I rejoin, ‘but I have a guide who comes from the place.’

“ ‘Then you will go there?’

I hesitate. “All arrangements have been made for my departure from the South, tomorrow,” I mutter uncertainly.

“ ‘In that case I have a request to make. ’

“ ‘With pleasure. ’



Paul Brunton with the 'Maharishi'

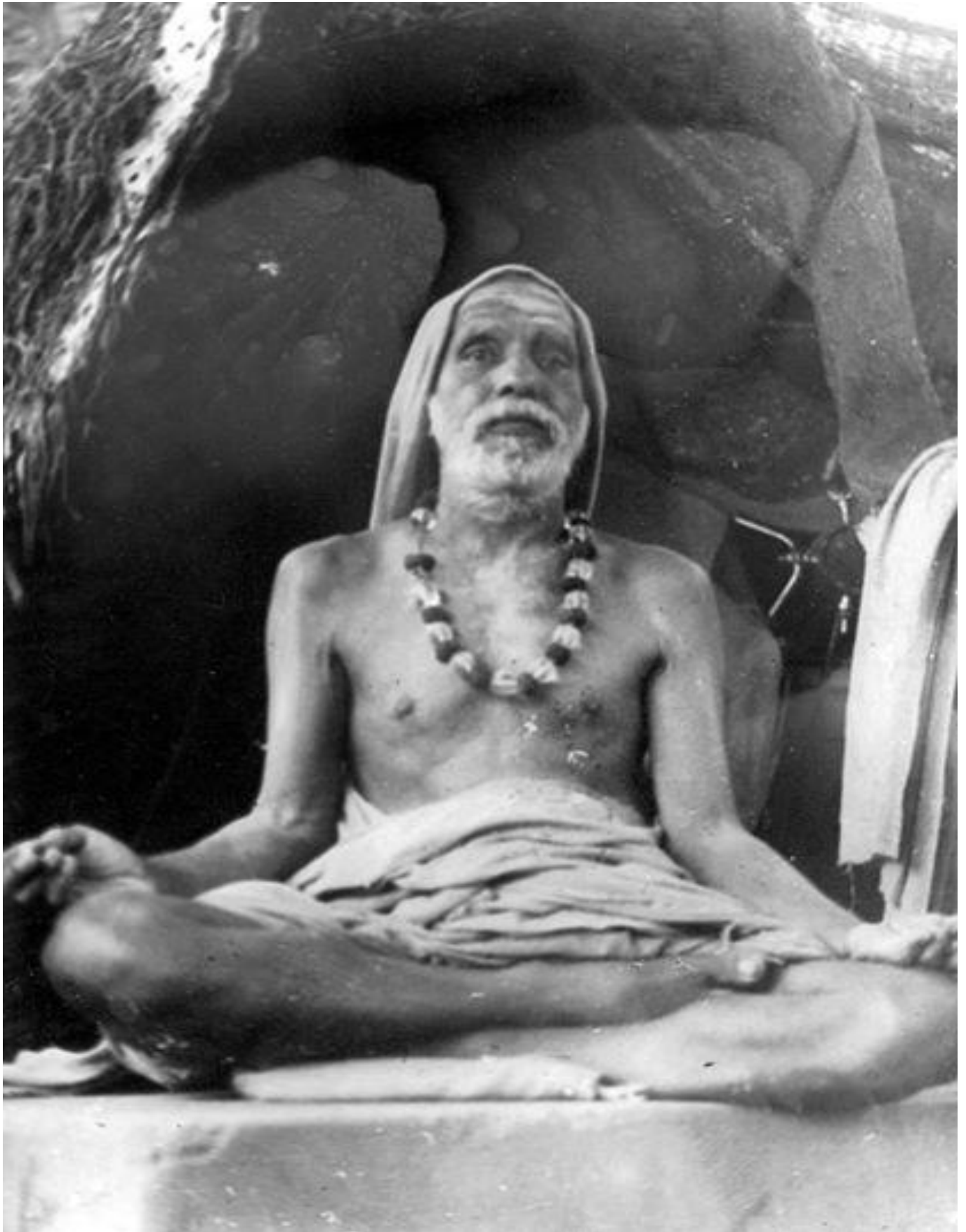
“ ‘Promise me that you will not leave South India before you have met the Maharishi’ I read in his eyes a sincere desire to help me. The promise is given. A benignant smile crosses his face. ‘Do not be anxious. You shall discover that which you seek.’ ”

The *Jagadguru*, Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetha, was a multifaceted genius. The term *Jagadguru* aptly suited him. He had devotees from all walks of life. From the downtrodden to the affluent, from Hindus to Muslims, from Asians to Europeans, there were many who found solace from this man who lived in a small thatched hut in Kanchipuram. He was known throughout the world as a great *Jnani*, in

whose presence everyone found great peace and tranquillity.

We speak of time throwing up the Man of the Age. But often it was not a single man. When people are in need of exemplars of more than one path, time (or, was it the timeless Spirit?) brings forth these Men of the Age. To quote, *Sadhu Arunachala* (Major A.W. Chadwick): "The classic examples of the four *Yogas* in modern times are: *Jnana*, Sri Ramana Maharshi; *Bhakti*, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa; *Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry; and *Karma*, Sri Shankaracharya of Kanchi Peetam."

His long tenure as *Peetadhipathi* is considered by many to have been the Golden Era of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. He attained *Mahasamadhi* on 8, January, 1994, at the age of 100. A never ending stream of people filed past the same dias where they had been having his *darshan* all these years. The saint's transcendence of religion, caste and creed was eloquently attested by numerous Muslims in traditional headgear and several Christian nuns in the 3-mile long queue. Roads jammed as crowds of people descended on Kanchi. The then Prime Minister of India, P.V.Narasimha Rao, cancelled all his programs to attend the interment ceremony. A shrine was erected on the spot of his *samadhi*. Not surprisingly, the Sage of Kanchi continues to draw hordes of the needy and the faithful to his eternal presence to this day.



PARAMACHARYA AND ME

In 1940-41, His Holiness *Kanchi Mahaperiyava*, came to camp in Tiruvannamalai. The reception committee had arranged for a grand, traditional reception which included taking him in a palanquin around the four main streets encircling the Temple, one night.

Our family was staying in a house on Big Street at that time. When the procession reached our house, it was past midnight. His Holiness stopped the procession in front of our house and accepted the honour extended to him by my parents. I was only five years old at that time and was fast asleep. My parents gathered those who were awake, reached the palanquin and introduced them to His Holiness. Maha Periyava specifically asked for the 'second son' and my father reported that I, the 'second son' was adamant on his deep sleep not being disturbed and coming out. His Holiness insisted that I be lifted up and brought to his presence. When I was brought, I am told by my mother, His Holiness intently looked at me with a gracious smile, plucked a jasmine flower from the garland he was wearing on his neck and flipped it towards me as a sign of blessing. My mother added that the flower came and hit the right side of my chest, which she felt was a great blessing poured on me by His Holiness.

* * * * *

All my life, I have been totally devoted to Sri Bhagavan and for propagation of his Teaching. At the same time, I have moved very closely with staunch devotees of Paramacharya and have had tremendous admiration for and adoration to him. Since I could not observe '*Karma Marga*', I could not move closely with the inimitable Sage of Kanchi.

* * * * *



Kanakkamma

Kanakkamma, an Old Devotee of Bhagavan Ramana recalls an insightful encounter with the sage of Kanchi: "It was an evening in the year 1958. The Kanchi Acharya was camping in West Mambalam in Madras. When I went to the camp, there was nobody else except a couple of Mutt workers with the Acharya. It was indeed a rare opportunity for me to have a quiet, leisurely darshan. I bowed before him and stood up with palms joined. The Acharya smiled very graciously and asked me, 'Are you here (in Madras) these days?' I said 'Yes'. He made very kind enquiries about my mother and other family members and then asked, 'Are you not still at Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai?' I said, 'I am there ever since I moved to that place.' What the Acharya said on hearing my reply thrilled me. He said, 'Oh, you live in solitude?'. I was overwhelmed by his apt, kind words that I could



Paramacharya seated inside the Mena ("cramped wooden box")

hardly articulate the word 'Yes'. I just nodded in assent. The Acharya then said, 'And you listen to Vedanta?'. I again nodded. Acharya continued, 'And, of course, you cook your own food?' The three questions of the Acharya, which were more affirmative than interrogative in tone, plunged me in pure joy! I said 'Please bless me that I may continue like this.' 'Yes, yes!', said the Acharya giving me a gracious look and moving his right hand up in a benedictory gesture.

I was, then as now, living alone in an apartment near Sri Ramanasramam. Muruganar was daily giving me lessons on Sri Bhagavan's *Nool Tirattu* (*Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, in Tamil). I cooked my own food! It was astounding the way the Acharya in three terse Tamil phrases not only summed up my daily life but wholeheartedly endorsed it and blessed it! So powerful are his look and words and so overwhelming his compassion!"

* * * * *



*A. Haji
(Riaz Padamsee)*

Spiritually advanced friends of Paul Brunton used to request him to advise as to how they could further progress in their *sadhana*. Brunton used to advise them to go to India and have *darshan* of His Holiness at Kanchi. To a few of them, he would be specifically guiding that they should, after having the *darshan* of His Holiness, go to Arunachala and stay at Sri Ramanasramam and add that would help them spiritually enormously. Some of them have met me and revealed this to me.

One such close admirer of Paul Brunton was a young Muslim businessman - A. Haji. He used to live in the USA. Whenever he visited India, he would visit Kanchi without fail and have *darshan* of His Holiness. Since he was an intellectual, he was drawn to Sri Bhagavan's Direct Teaching of Self-Enquiry. At a particular stage, he fell into a dilemma of having to choose between Ramana Maharshi and His Holiness as to who his true *Guru* was. He also wanted clarity on what form of meditation was meant for him, though he was doing some form of spiritual practice.

He narrated to me the experience he had once in the presence of Kanchi Shankaracharya :

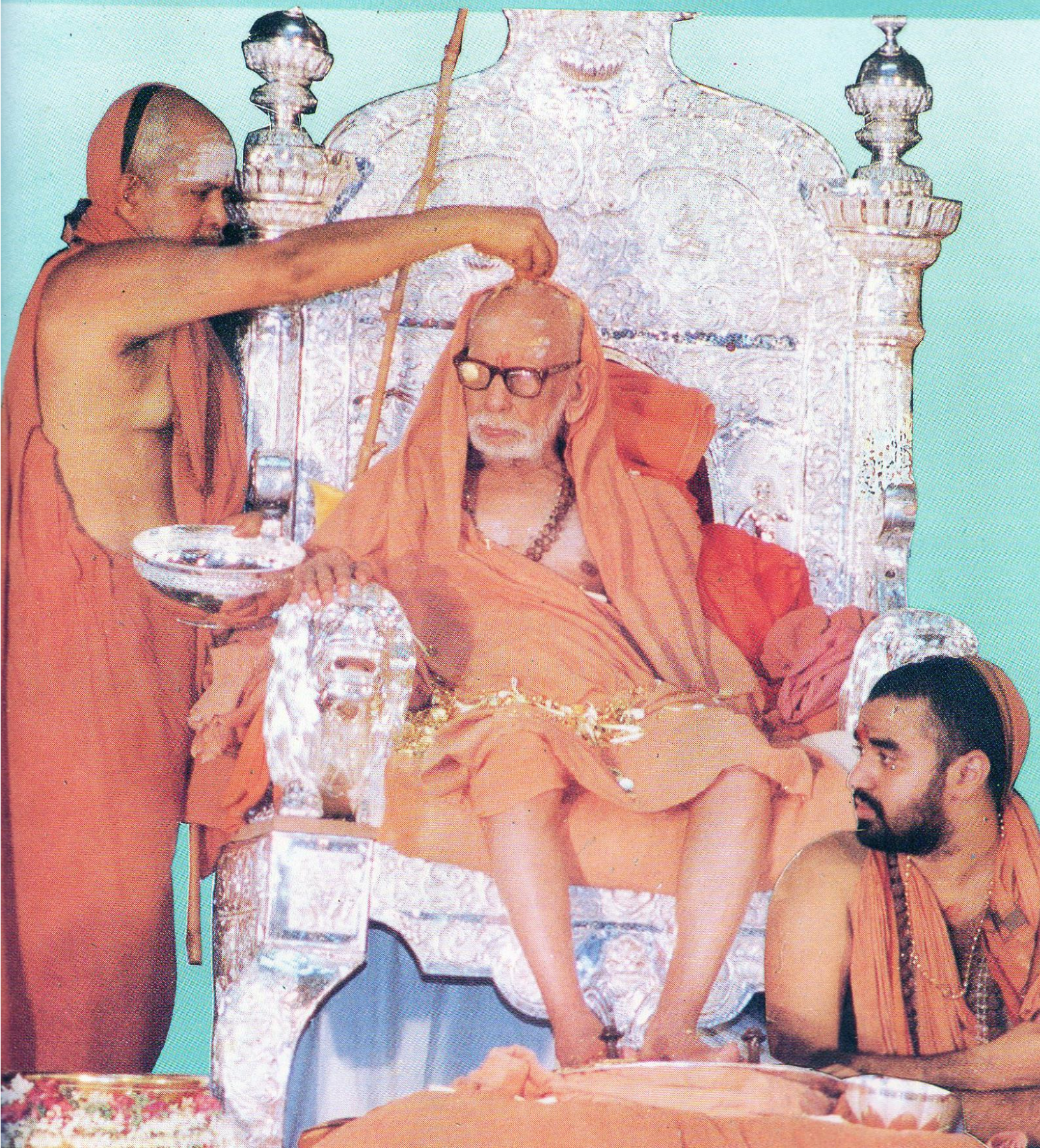
“A frail old man sitting in a cramped wooden box, draped in a thin orange cloth and crowned with a wreath of tender green leaves: my first impression of the Shankaracharya! The box is his palanquin, with the carrying poles on two sides detached. He spends much of his time inside this tiny room, no larger than a big refrigerator. Yet he seems quite comfortable in it, sitting crossed-legged, gazing out of the open door at his visitors. He even has a bookshelf inside the palanquin. I can only see one eye and a part of his face, steadily looking at me. Not a word is said. In a few minutes he draws shut the sliding doors of the palanquin. He has effectively retired, even though the palanquin is in full view.”

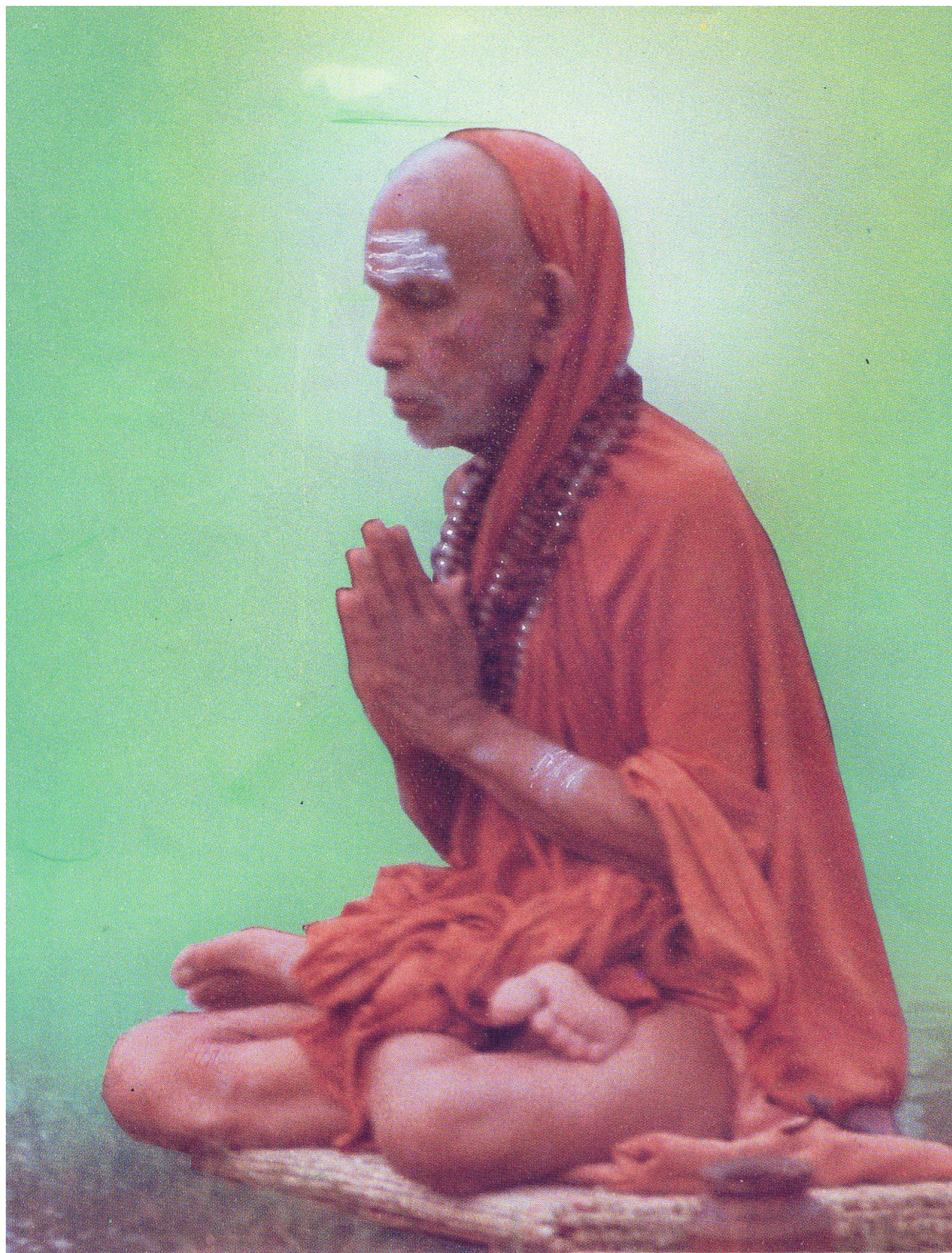
“I quickly carry my precious foreign friends' letters to the Mutt's manager. He is cordial and reassuring: 'I will read the letters to him at eight.' I glance at my watch and it is 7 a.m. I return to the audience chamber. There are about twenty people standing behind the bamboo barricades, gazing at the Shankaracharya, who is peering back at them from his palanquin.”

“A Tamil matron standing in front of me is pleading with the Shankaracharya. I do not understand Tamil, but I pick up a key Sanskrit word. She is pleading for *moksha* - liberation from the endless round of birth and death. With hands prayerfully folded, she becomes more and more impassioned, finally breaking into tears. The Shankaracharya gazes at her compassionately, wordlessly, all through her performance, and is moved to raise his right hand in the *abhayamudra* - the gesture of 'fear-not'. The woman leaves, apparently reassured.”

“The Shankaracharya talks softly in almost a hoarse whisper, and mostly to his attendants. He asks questions in sign language punctuated with a few words. The attendant then repeats the question and relays the answer back to the Shankaracharya.”

*Golden Adorations to the
Jagatguru Sankaracharya of Kanchi
marking his Birth Centenary*





*Our Prayers are offered to the One
Who ever prays for the welfare of the entire humanity*

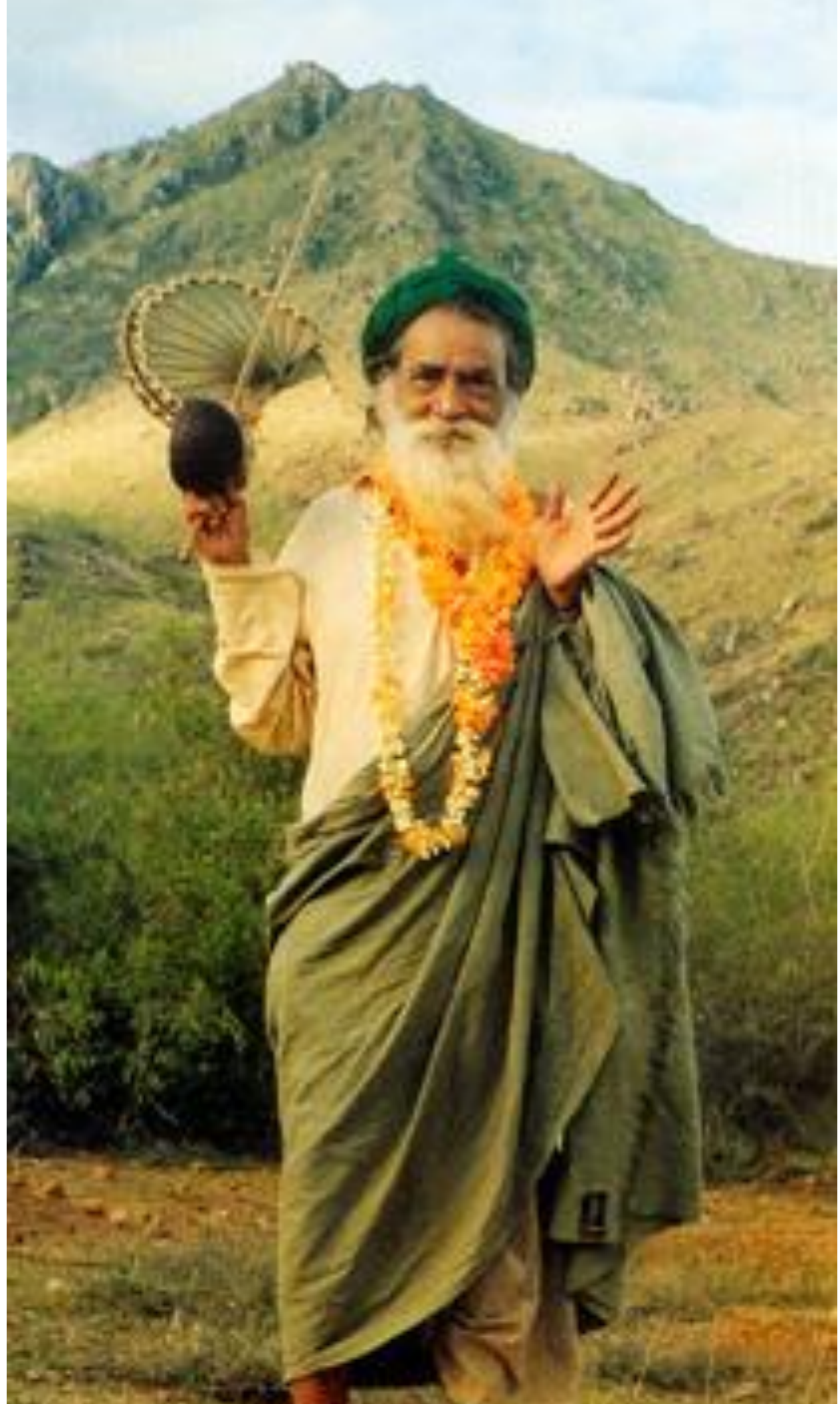
“I lean against a bamboo pole for support. Many devotees walk by. They bring their problems, victories and sorrows to the Shankaracharya. He listens intently to his attendant, voicing these messages of humankind. Often, he asks questions. He is hard of hearing and the attendant must shout loudly. A young boy, hardly twelve, folds his hands in prayer in front of the Shankaracharya, and at the urging of his mother, rattles off a longish prayer. The Shankaracharya asks a question. On hearing the reply, a smile suddenly appears on the Shankaracharya's face. He seems more than happy.”

“I grow weak in the knees. I cannot stand there any longer. I look at my watch. It's, only 7:20 a.m. I go to the back of the crowd and find a seat from where I can see the Shankaracharya. My tiredness refuses to go away. I find that if I lean my head against the wall, I am quite comfortable.”

“I open my eyes. It is already ten minutes past 8. I have been asleep for almost an hour! I stand up to stretch, silhouetted against the bright sky. The Shankaracharya immediately points a finger at me: ‘Where do you come from?’ The question is shot at me through the attendant. ‘I come from America,’ I answer, surprised by this sudden turn of attention. ‘When did you land in India?’ he asks. ‘I arrived on the 24th of last month,’ I quickly guess. Then a short silence. ‘Do you have a question for the Shankaracharya?’ ”

“I decide to first seek advice about my meditation, postponing that crucial question I had decided to test him with, namely, ‘Who is my *Guru*?’ As if echoing this, the attendant queries back, ‘Who is your *Guru*? Who do you think of in your meditation?’ I find myself answering, ‘**Ramana Maharshi**’. This is a strange turn of events. I have just answered my own unasked question without the least hesitation, almost as if, at some deeper level, I already knew the answer. Then my question on meditation is answered. I am advised to discontinue my current practice and concentrate on focussing my love and attention on my *Guru*.”

“The Shankaracharya ends the discussion with a very Indian shaking of his head from side to side, which seems to say: ‘All is understood and will be taken care of.’ With his right hand raised in blessing, he gently motions me out of the audience chamber.”



YOGI RAMSURATKUMAR



Life

Yogi Ramsuratkumar was born in a village near Kashi (Varanasi) in North India. He was fascinated by the sacred river Ganga and playing along its banks gave him immense joy. Even as a young boy, he longed for the company of the many holy men who thronged to Ganga Mata. His association with them ignited the spark of spirituality in his heart. Soon, this spark grew into a burning urge for inner peace.

A seemingly ordinary incident - the death of a bird right in front of his eyes – drove home the message of life's transitory nature. One of the monks he met at that time, specifically guided him saying that his *Guru* lived in South India. In due course, he went to the Himalayas. There he came across the book, *Light on Yoga*, by Sri Aurobindo. Inspired by the book, he went to Pondicherry in South India to meet Sri Aurobindo. He was disappointed when the *darshan* did not happen. A wandering *sadhu* on the beach there told him about a great *Mahatma* in nearby Tiruvannamalai who was accessible all twenty-four hours of the day.

He came to Tiruvannamalai and had the glorious *darshan* of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. After drenching himself for a few months in the all-pervading Grace of Sri Bhagavan at Sri Ramanasramam, he went to the Himalayas once again. This time, he went with a heart overflowing with the bliss of Sri Bhagavan's silence.

With the passage of time, the divine fervour that he had experienced in Sri Bhagavan's powerful presence began to wane. So, he returned to Sri Ramanasramam. But, Sri Bhagavan had by that time dropped the body and the absence of the physical presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi affected Yogi deeply.

He expressed his anguish to *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, an Old Devotee of Sri Bhagavan. On expressing his need for a guru living in the body, TKS guided him to Swami Ramdas living in Kerala. Swami Ramdas told him to chant the name of Lord Rama – '*Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*', continuously for twenty four hours. In response, Yogi chanted it for seven days, uninterruptedly !

This brought back his divine madness. Subsequently, he wandered all over India for seven years from 1952 to 1959. His spiritual journey culminated when his feet again touched holy Arunachala!



".....when his feet again touched holy Arunachala....."



Some Quotes of Yogi Ramsuratkumar

Yogi Ramsuratkumar never claimed to be a *Guru*. On the other hand, he would repeatedly say, “This beggar died in 1952 at the holy feet of his master, Swami Ramdas. Father alone exists now, as this beggar.”

“My Father alone exists. Nobody else, nothing else. Past, present, future – only my Father – all-pervasive, everywhere. In Him, everything is included. Every object – man, animal, bird, tree, stone – all is nothing but my Father.”

“Father has not given the work of teaching and preaching to this beggar. Father has given the work of preaching and teaching to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Ram Thirtha Sri Aurobindo, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Swami Ramdas.

“Father has given this beggar only the work of alleviating the physical, mental and spiritual suffering of the seekers. It is all only the Father! Father and Father alone!”



One of the earliest photos of Yogi Ramsuratkumar standing under the 'Punnai' tree

YOGIJI AND ME

Several years back, at this same venue, I covered Yogi Ramsuratkumar's life extensively. Those who are interested, may please go to the AHAM website and download those details. It was mostly on Yogiji as a devotee of Bhagavan Ramana.

This time, I felt, we could concentrate on how Yogiji helped spiritual aspirants to overcome their suffering. Yogiji's method of dissolving their suffering, pain and problems was very unique. All of us know that the most difficult stumbling block to spiritual progress, is the suffering that is inflicted by oneself, by others or by circumstances.

My long association with Yogi Ramsuratkumar of more than forty years is studded with precious pearls of soul-melting incidents that reveal the extreme kindness, love, care and compassion that 'Swami' -- as we fondly addressed Yogiji -- exuded.

During the holy festivals of Karthigai Deepam and Maha Shivaratri, many visiting *sadhus* used to walk into my Ashram office and perform the 'miracles' like producing images of Gods and objects from nowhere. Though I did not know how these 'miracles' were done, I was never attracted to or impressed by them. Sri Bhagavan's assurance that all such "miracles are comparable to incidents taking place in one's dream", was my support!

Lots of miracles had happened around Yogi Ramsuratkumar too. But they were very different – they invariably happened to relieve people of their physical and mental suffering. But, Yogiji never claimed that he did them. On the contrary he would always insist, "Everything is happening by Father's Grace!" In some rare cases, when his prayers seemed to have failed, Yogiji would say that too was also Father's will!



".....Yogiji blessing devotees at the entrance to his house in Sannidhi Street....."

Even if what they prayed for did not happen, people who came to Yogiji went away happy, because of the love, compassion and care that the Sage poured unconditionally on them. Asking nothing of anybody and taking no credit for himself, one can only guess the enormous influence and help that he brought into the lives of innumerable persons.

Once, Anuradha and I were searching for Yogiji inside the big temple. Suddenly we heard our names being called out aloud, “Ganesa! Radha!” We turned and saw Yogiji seated on the inner steps of Brahma Thirtham, a tank inside the temple, calling us to join him. “Have you anything to say to this beggar?” We started telling him about some major problem at the Ashram. Yogiji suddenly called out to a poor *sadhu*, “Swami! Swami!” The *sadhu*



“...sat sangh with Yogiji...”

approached him with reluctance and with an attitude of indifference. Yogiji enquired after his broken arm. The *sadhu* gave a big account of how despite all the various treatments, including one by a bone setter, the pain persisted. Yogiji looked at him with compassion and touched his hand with delicate tenderness. The *sadhu* continued to ignore Yogiji.

Yogiji asked *Anuradha* to bring water in his coconut shell and poured it on the *sadhu*’s arm. He did this a few times. Even when it was going on, the *sadhu* continued to complain angrily about all those who couldn’t heal his arm. Yogiji gently told him, “Shake your arm, Swami!”

The *sadhu* did so and was surprised - the pain in his broken arm had vanished! Instantly realizing Yogiji’s greatness, the *sadhu* fell prostrate at Yogiji’s feet and thanked him. And what did the Sage do? He gave the poor *sadhu* some money to have tea and snacks!

Yet another time, Yogiji was seated near the *magizha maram* - a tree inside the big temple, where we usually gathered around him. Swami was approached by a young couple with their year old baby. Yogi’s face lit up as he blessed the child. The parents said, “Swami! A few months ago we brought our baby to you, and begged you to cure its bent and contorted leg. You blessed the baby saying the leg would become all right. Now, we ourselves do not remember which leg was bent. The cure is so perfect!” Raising his hands

to the sky, Yogiji said, “This beggar does nothing, *Amma!* It’s all Father’s glory! Father alone blesses, Father alone cures! It is Father who protects all! ”

Though he had brief periods of privacy, Yogiji was usually engaged in fielding a seemingly endless stream of visitors who came for his *darshan* at his home or in the spacious flag stoned courtyards of the big temple.

Once, Mrs. Gangu, the wife of a retired Major General and belonging to a rich family, came with her son Vivek to the Ashram to seek the blessing from Sri Bhagavan’s shrine for the success of Vivek’s soon to start advertising agency. After *puja* was done at Sri Bhagavan’s shrine, she said that she had heard a lot about a Saint living in Tiruvannamalai named Yogi Ramsuratkumar. She wondered whether they could meet with him. I took them to Sannidhi Street. Swami received them, “What can this beggar do for Gangu Ma?” She showed Vivek and prayed for Swami’s blessings on Vivek for his new advertising agency.

Yogiji ignored him and asked, “Does Vivek have brothers and sisters?” She replied, “Yes, Swami! An elder sister...But Swami, what about Vivek?” Again, Yogiji ignored her pleading and asked, “What is her name?” “Kalyani, Swami! Swami, about Vivek...” “Is she married?” “She is married, Swami! Vivek needs...”

But no matter what, Yogiji persisted asking about the sister, “Where is Kalyani? Tell this beggar, how is Kalyani now?” That broke the dam of resistance in Gangu Ma!

She started crying profusely, “Swami! Kalyani is now living only with us in Mercara. Her marriage was a failure. She was ill-treated by her husband’s family. My husband and I tried our level best to patch up matters, but could not succeed. Her in-laws are stubborn.”

With abundant compassion, Yogiji said, “*Amma!* Kalyani should lead a happy life. This beggar pleads with you and your husband too. Please go again to them, apologise. Make amends. Make Kalyani live happily with her husband. Next time, you should bring the good news of Kalyani living with her husband to this beggar! Father’s blessings are on Kalyani and on every member of your family!”

Gangu Ma did as told. Within a few months, she came back, this time with her husband, and gave the good news to Yogiji – surprise of surprises, not only was Kalyani happily back with her husband, but she had conceived. Every member in her family was happy! When both the parents thanked Yogiji profusely, Swami raised his hands and said, “It is Father, *Amma!* Father alone blesses. This beggar does nothing. Father alone exists!”

Another time, I was seated alone with Swami. A worried looking lady came and prostrated to him. It was obviously her first visit. Yogiji asked her, “What can this beggar do for you, *Amma*?” She replied, “Swami! I have come from a far off place near Coimbatore. For the past seven or eight years, I have been trying without success to get my daughter married. It has been many years since her father passed away. I would like you to bless her so that she gets married soon!”

Yogiji asked, “What is the name of your daughter?” She replied, “Kamala, Swami! We live in a very remote village and life is very burdensome. Swami, if Kamala doesn’t get married, I don’t know what I will do.”

Yogiji was visibly moved. He went into silence. He then looked up, looked down, looked over the lady’s head...all the time gesturing with raised hands. This went on for some time. Though the lady sat restlessly, it was a divine sight for me to see Yogiji go into mystical ecstasy. I started offering prayers to Yogiji within my heart. Suddenly, Yogiji spoke, “*Amma*! Kamala will get married on February 7th. Father says everything will be all right and that the marriage will take place in a grand manner.” He gave her fruits and I could see that she was very pleased. The lady took leave and left - immensely satisfied and smiling widely. This happened sometime in November or December.

Next April, when I was seated with Yogiji, the same lady came in and happily prostrated. She said, “I came to do *puja* to Arunachaleswara. After finishing, I hurried and came to prostrate to you, Swami! I am rushing to catch the bus.” Yogiji looked at her with recognition and asked, “How is Kamala, *Amma*?” The lady answered, “Kamala got married and is happy, Swami.” “When did the marriage take place, *Amma*?” “On February 7th, Swami!” She was restless and in a hurry to rush out. Yogiji gave her fruits as *prasad* .

After she went away, Yogiji turned to me and said, “Look at this strange thing, Ganesa! People come and ask this beggar for favours. This beggar sends their prayers to Father. It is Father who answers their prayers and not this beggar. When their prayer is fulfilled, they do not even have the courtesy to inform this beggar so. Has not the beggar got the responsibility to thank Father! What to do, Ganesa!”

It was then that I recollected what had happened on that day when Swami specifically told the lady that Kamala would get married on February 7th. And that was exactly what had happened. A doubt rose in me, “Did Swami through his power make it happen on that specified day. Or, did he foresee that it would happen on that day?” I put this doubt before Yogiji. He asked me, “Ganesa! Have you read the works of Shakespeare?” I replied, “No, Swami! *Antony and Cleopatra* was a non-detail text in my B.A. course. Except that, I have

not read any other works of Shakespeare.”

“Now, this beggar has read *Othello*. You have not read it, so you do not know in which Act of the Play, Othello kills his wife. This beggar therefore knows that in the Sixth Act, Othello kills his wife. That’s all. Don’t ask me any more questions, Ganesa!” His answer surprised me and at the same time satisfied me. Yogiji then went into deep silence. To see him in that state was truly a divine sight indeed! He smiled and gave me *prasad* !

One day, I was seated in the presence of Yogiji along with the famous music director Ilayaraja. No one was permitted to come in, though there was a large crowd waiting outside. Yogiji commented, “They have all come not to see this beggar but to see the king, the *raja* - Ilayaraja!” He asked Ilayaraja to stand at the entrance and give *darshan* to the crowd and come back, which he did.

After some time, Yogiji noticed a lady standing some distance away and hesitating to come closer. Yogiji looked at me and said, “Ganesa! Nagamma is standing outside. Will you go and call her in?” She was a sweeper working at the Ashram. Though the society of those days treated her as a low caste, untouchable woman, I had no hesitation in calling her in. She was reluctant and so I went out and brought her in. I told her to prostrate to Swami which she happily did. Yogiji asked her what she wanted. Nagamma, with tears in her eyes, appealed to Yogiji to give protection to her family members. Yogiji made her sit in front of him and looked steadily at her. It so happened that she sat near Ilayaraja.

Like a lightning flash, the scene took me years back to the experience that Balarama Reddiar once had in the Old Hall in Sri Bhagavan’s presence. Balarama Reddiar had told me, that one day when he entered the Hall, he was wonderstruck to witness a King of a small state in North India and a retired old sweeper seated next to each other. It was a festival day and the Hall was consequently filled with devotees. Reddiar remembered a *sloka* in the great epic *Ramayana* wherein King Rama was extolled, “Lord Rama did not distinguish between a King and a low caste person. His heart treated them all equally!” Reddiar concluded, “Sages come and live in our midst only to prove the import and truth of the ancient texts!”

How true! I too was witness to the same splendour in the presence of Yogi Ramsuratkumar that day! This, of course, was from my point of view. From Nagamma’s view point, Yogiji instantly lifted and dissolved her sorrow, sadness and suffering by making her sit, looking at her and giving her his blessings and plenty of fruits as *prasad*.



Smt.Vijaya and Janarthanan doing 'Pada Puja' to Yogiji (Anuradha is seated to the right of Yogiji and Ganesan, left)

As I have narrated earlier, my good friend, the late S.P. Janarthanan, bought a small printing machine from me and relieved me of my financial strain. He was also the owner of a huge printing press complex in Bangalore that cost millions of rupees. The small machine cost only a few hundred thousands of rupees. His business partners and family members fiercely opposed Janarthanan buying the small machine as they had no use for it. Janarthanan responded firmly, saying, “Swami asked me to buy it and give relief to the grandnephew of his Guru Bhagavan Ramana. No one can ever stop me from obeying my Guru. You say it will incur loss. Maybe! I ask you, ‘Does Guru’s Grace mean only profit and gain? Cannot the Guru’s Grace be in the form of giving us loss and strain? Guru’s Grace is Supreme!’” Strangely, the name of the machine that he bought from me was ‘SRI RAM’.

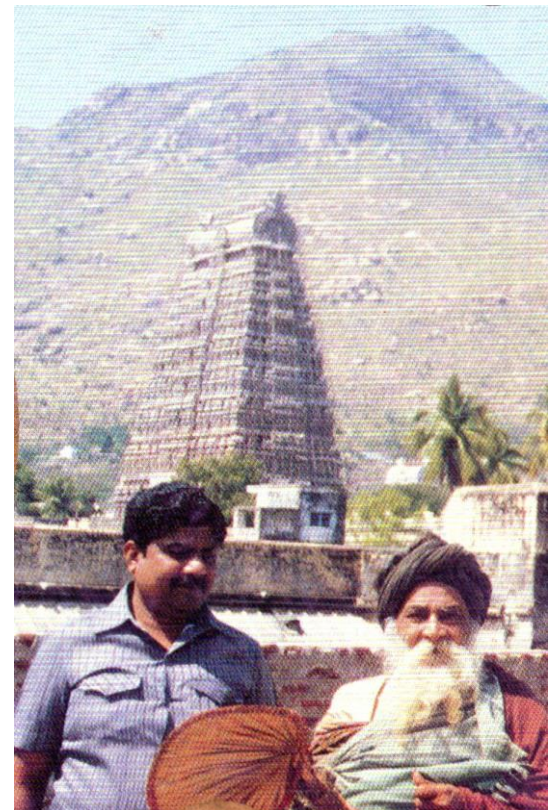
After a few months, there were riots in Bangalore. It was stirred by politicians and it created a wedge of hatred and vengeance between the local Karnataka population and the Tamilians who had migrated there from Tamil Nadu. As a result, there was looting and arson of the Tamilians’ properties. In that sad situation, Janarthanan’s huge printing complex was totally burnt down. But the miracle of miracles was that ‘SRI RAM’ was the only press untouched by the fire and in perfect condition! Not only that, but, for the next six months – the period they had to wait for getting compensation from the insurance company – only ‘SRI RAM’ had earned money for the sustenance of the entire family of Janarthanan and his partners!

There was yet another incident where Yogiji's Grace helped Janarthanan in a financial crisis. Once, Janarthanan urgently needed a huge inflow of funds. A finance company in Chennai asked him to meet them for discussion at Chennai. When he reached Chennai, they told him to go back as they would be coming to Bangalore the next day. Janarthanan felt that as the transaction dealt with a huge amount of money, he would do better to go to Tiruvannamalai, get the blessings of Yogiji and take the night bus to reach Bangalore the next day.

The close devotees of Yogiji who were permitted to stay with him in the night, never did anything without Yogiji's permission and blessing. In keeping with this, Janarthanan did not utter a word about his plan; nor did Swami ask him. Before breakfast, lunch and dinner, Swami would command Janarthanan to go to the nearby eateries and bring them both food to eat. One day passed, two days passed...On the third day, there arose a thought in Janarthanan about the financial company visiting Bangalore. That day, after lunch, Yogiji looked sternly at Janarthanan, for some time. Suddenly, Yogiji roared, "Janarthana ! **One, two, three** ! Stand up, run to the door, go back to Bangalore." Janarthanan, literally ran to the door. Again, a roar, "Stop, Janarthana ! Look at your watch and tell me the time !" Janarthanan, "Swami it is 1.23 p.m." "Yes, Janarthana ! It is **one, two, three** ! Father blesses you !"

When he reached Bangalore, Janarthanan received an apology from the financial company as they could not come to Bangalore as scheduled. However, they had arrived at an unanimous decision to sanction the full amount needed by him, even without any form of security or surety ! Janarthanan said, "It was nothing but Yogiji's Grace, as the company has never released money without documents and securities. Swami detained me, poured his blessings on me and also helped me, financially !"

The *darshan* of Yogiji was always an informal affair. Clutching a worn, coconut shell begging bowl and palm leaf fan in one hand, the other raised high in benediction, Yogiji is brisk, even businesslike. The deep sensitivity, empathy and compassion radiating from this angelic figure is matched only by the trust, admiration and sheer reverence of the supplicants – the many families, mendicants, farmers, professionals, children, businessmen. While some are content with paying their respects, others relate their problems and wait for answers.



S.P. Janarthanan with Yogiji
(in front of Arunachala Temple)

One day, an old village lady came to Yogiji. She looked like a beggar woman. Swami was very kind to her, received her and made her sit in front of me. “*Amma!* You have come to visit the temple?” he asked her. She replied, “No, no Swami! I came only to see you! Govindasamy’s marriage has to take place, Swami!” Yogiji, smilingly asked her, “Who is Govindasamy?” “He is my son, Swami! I came all the way from Salem to see you and appeal to you to make the marriage of Govindasamy happen!” “Is he your only son? What is he doing?” asked Swami. “Govindasamy is my sixth son, Swami. He is a night watchman in a company.” “What is his age?” “He is thirty six years old. Govindasamy should get married, Swami.”

At that time, Yogiji turned to me and said, “Look at her, Ganesa! What love a mother has for her son! What deep love!” Swami was emotionally moved and his voice was choked.

“*Amma!* Do you ever go to any temple and offer prayers?” “No. Swami! I would not be permitted, Swami! Govindasamy should get married, Swami!” “Are you staying with your children?” “No, Swami! All the six sons drove me out and I am begging in the streets and sleeping in a *mantap* where no one stays!” “Do you offer worship to any God?” “No, Swami! I do not know any God.” Yogiji persisted, “In the *mantap* where you sleep, there should be some image of some God on one of the pillars. Have you noticed any?” “Oh, yes Swami! But, I do not know what God it is!” “If you light an oil lamp every night at that pillar for thirty six days, Govindasamy will surely get married!” assured Yogiji.

The lady excitedly got up and said, “Swami! I shall leave for Salem right away and start lighting the oil lamp from this evening itself.” Yogiji compassionately asked her, “*Amma!* Do you have money for your return journey?” The lady replied, “I have a few rupees, Swami! But, not enough for the bus fare.” “Shall I give you...?” Before Yogiji could finish his sentence, she interjected, “No, no, no! I am confident I can somehow get the balance amount by begging at the local bus stand. I cannot accept money from you, Swami! But, please bless Govindasamy so that he gets married soon, Swami!” Yogiji thrust some fruits into her hands as *prasad*. As she hurried out she added, “I start lighting the lamp for thirty six days from this evening itself, as I am very eager to see Govindasamy married at the earliest.”

Yogiji was all smiles, “Ganesa! This is true love of a mother. Can anything equal a mother’s love! Father’s blessings on her and on Govindasamy! Father blesses them both!” He raised both his hands and happily turned them towards the direction in which the lady had disappeared.



“.....Father says there is no problem.....”

There was a wealthy couple (Riaz Padamsee and Behroz Padamsee) from Bombay. They had a lucrative business in America. They are staunch devotees of Sri Bhagavan and had come to Arunachala from USA for a few days. I took them to Yogiji. It was their third visit to Yogiji. The photo taken by Behroz Padamsee of Yogiji raising both his hands in benediction still adorns many homes of Yogiji’s devotees!

The lady asked Yogiji, “Swami! Can I express a very personal anguish of mine ?” “Yes, yes ! Tell this beggar !” “My mother-in-law wants me to give her a ‘grandson’, as there are no male descendants in the family. I am 40 years old and a mother of two daughters. The doctors in America have strictly advised me against having another child because of medical complications. But, mother-in-law insists on it.”

Looking intently at her, Yogiji raised both his hands, and said, “Father says there is no problem in your getting a son. So, without hesitation, conceive !” The couple was overjoyed and returned to the U.S. A few months later, I got a call from this pious lady. Sadly she told me, “Ganesan! In obedience to Yogiji’s command, I conceived – much to the displeasure of my doctors ! And sure enough, a miscarriage took place. I am in intense sorrow. Will you please inform Swami and get me his blessings ?”

When I reported this to Yogiji, he firmly said, “Father says there is a son ! Father’s blessings are fully on her. Assure her !” She conceived again. Most unfortunately, this time too, there was a miscarriage. The doctors were furious with her. She called me in a state of panic. I ran to Yogiji. Strangely, Yogiji too expressed anger, “What ? Father says there is a son for her. Where is the room for doubting ?” This time, I got jittery. How to convey this message to a lady who was so deeply affected ? Praying to Yogiji in my heart, I communicated what he said to her. For several months, I did not hear anything from her. After more than a year, I got a call. It was from her. She joyously told me that she had given birth to a ‘baby boy’; and, both she and her son were in good health ! I reported it to Yogiji ! Now, that ‘baby boy’ has completed his college education !!



“....a fully surrendered devotee : Behroz Padamsee....”

When I was sent to live for a year in Kashi by Yogiji, he was very specific that I should not write to anyone else except him. That was the period when Yogiji was not talking directly to Anuradha, though she went regularly to sit silently in his presence. Though I was writing often to Yogiji, I had not written any letter to Anuradha. She got worried about my safety and wanted to know how I was faring in Kashi.

She went to Yogiji and prayed silently to him to reveal to her about how I was. Within a short time, a young couple came from Chennai, carrying with them a tiffin carrier filled with lunch that they had prepared that morning exclusively for Yogiji. Though they were well known to Swami, he enquired, “May I know your names !” The gentleman replied, “My name is ‘Ganesan’ and my wife’s name is ‘Ganga’. Swami, she takes good care of me, as advised by you !” Yogiji burst out laughing, “So, ‘Ganga’ is taking good care of ‘Ganesa’ ! Oh, Ganesa is being well taken care of by Ganga Ma !” Yes, indeed ! At that time, I was well

taken care of by Krishnamurti Foundation of India, Rajghat, Varanasi, on the banks of the Ganges. Moreover, Mother Ganga had blessed me by initiating me into a *Mantra* !

Once, when he was in Chennai, Ilayaraja got some excellent good apples from Kashmir. He rushed to Arunachala with a basket full of these apples. We both went early in the morning with the basket to Yogiji. After graciously receiving the basket and making us sit with him for half an hour he sent us away, saying, "Ganesa will have Ashram office work. He has to go. Let us take leave, friends." He gave us two apples each and told us to go back to the Ashram. It was 7.30 a.m.

My office work commenced at 9 o'clock and my assistant Anuradha would report promptly at 9.30. When, after doing *giri pradakshina* with Jnanasundari and prostrating to Sri Bhagavan's shrine Anuradha entered the office, she saw the Kashmir apples on my table. I said that I got them from Swami and that one of them was meant for her. She refused to accept it, saying, "I go round the Holy Hill, accompanied by somebody or the other, almost every day. Today also, while we reached the big temple, both of us felt like going to Yogiji's house, prostrating to him and seeking his blessings. He blessed us and gave us a banana each as *prasad*. You both casually visit him. You get good Kashmir apples, because you are the grandnephew of Sri Bhagavan and you are running the Ashram. And Ilayaraja? Well, he is very famous in the music field. While Jnanasundari and me are just ordinary folks. So, we get only the humble, local bananas. Is it fair?" I was aghast since I knew Anuradha didn't even like apples. I reminded her that Swami was hearing everything that was being talked about him and that she was making a very unfair comment. She left for her home, 'Savithri', to get ready for the office in a hurry....

When she reported for work at the office at 9.30, I came to know from her that Jayaraman - a devotee of Yogiji who worked in the local LIC office - came to '*Savithri*' with a sense of urgency as it was time for him to be at his office. Hurriedly placing an especially fine specimen of Kashmir apple in her hand, he told her, "Swami called me at 8 o'clock and gave this apple and told me that I should hand it over to you. He also insisted that I should not go to the office before giving you this apple!"

That evening, I pleaded with Anuradha that we should go to Yogiji and she should thank him for sending her the apple. Her sisters too had arrived from Chennai and were eager to meet Yogiji and receive his blessings. And so, off we went, in a group.

Swami appeared to be in a serious mood. There was already a small crowd waiting outside. He opened the door, stood at the entrance and as was usual for him, gave specific

directions as to who should sit where. Anuradha was seated in her place and her sisters were seated next to her. He turned to me and said very sternly, "*Thambi* (Boy), you stand at the entrance and allow the visitors who come, one by one, inside." So, happily I stood guard. He went and sat in his place. Anuradha's sisters had brought bananas. Swami distributed a banana each to every one seated, except me. He also ordered them to eat it. Then, he called me and said, "*Thambi*, collect the banana peels from everyone and throw them out." I did as bid and was about to throw the peels out when he roared, "*Thambi*, you should not throw them near the house. You have to take them and throw them in the big waste bin kept there by the roadside!"



'Ganesa ! This beggar is always with you !'

Noticing all that was taking place, Anuradha felt that Swami knew everything that had happened earlier and was demonstrating to her that he had no partiality. At that time, I was the *de facto* chief of the Ashram and yet, Yogiji was treating me like an ordinary office boy or rather, like a servant, while the crowd there was watching it! The moment Anuradha mentally apologized to Yogiji, immediately there was a complete change in him. He turned to me and said, "Ganesa! Come! Come and sit down in your usual place!" Then, laughing uproariously, he gave me a few blows on my back. And when Anuradha stood up and prostrated to him, Yogiji bent over and gave a few blows on the back of the prostrating Anuradha as well! What a 'sound' blessing it was!

Now, let me share with you how this incomparable *Siddha Purusha* helped me to transcend the two major hurdles of ‘body’ and ‘mind’ in my spiritual *sadhana*.

For thirty-eight years Yogi Ramsuratkumar had lived and played the role of a homeless beggar with the panache of a carefree millionaire. ‘Swami’ as he was affectionately called, was well known, not only in Tamil Nadu but also farther afield in India and abroad - sometimes in the most unexpected quarters! The gentleness of his speech – English, Tamil and Hindi – belied the force of his personality.

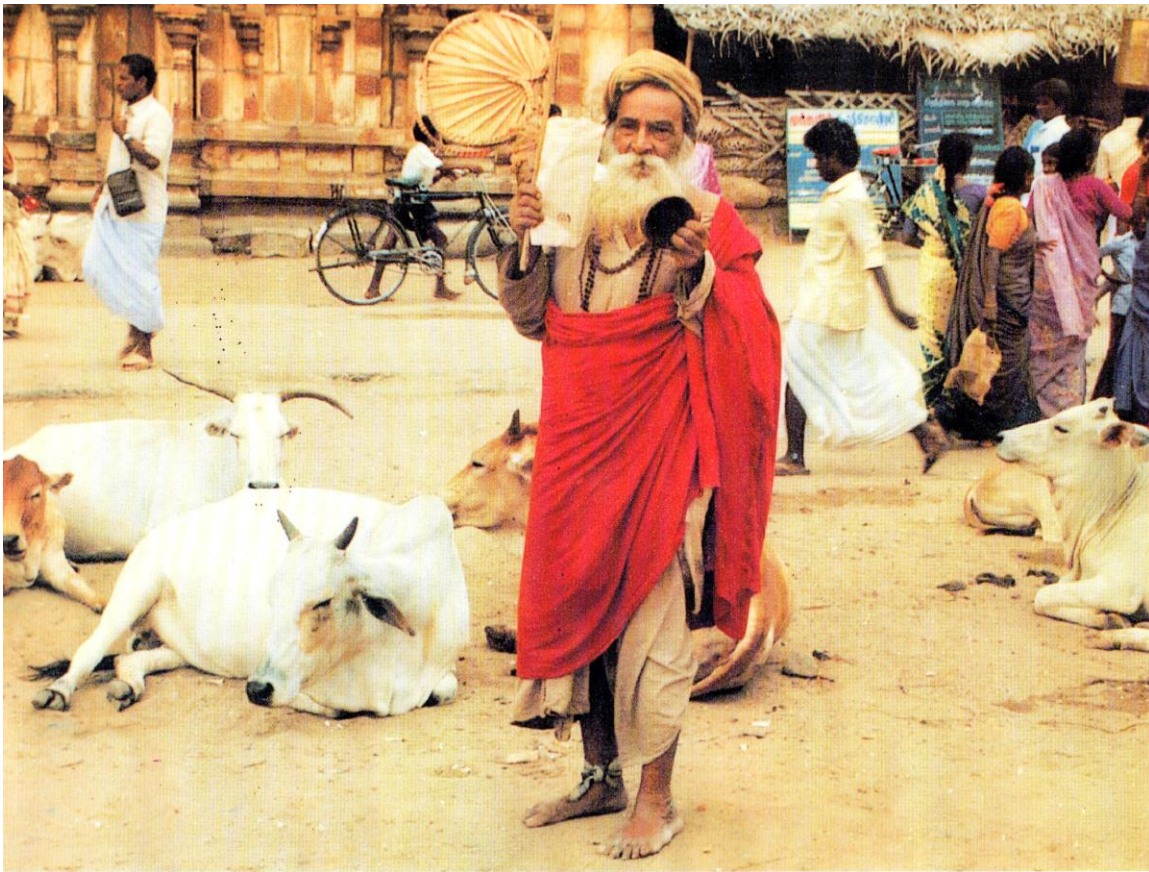
And, he gave freely of his life essence. If the gift was under-valued by the sophisticated, it was only because Yogiji was offering the fruit of his hard-earned experience for a price far less than what he had himself paid. However, for the unlettered soul – on the other hand – this process of give and take was an uncomplicated exchange!

I was twenty-three years old when I came to stay at Sri Ramanasramam. For more than thirty years of my stay inside the Ashram, I had the unique privilege of associating myself very closely with all the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan. They guided me, not by preaching to me but by their impeccable living. Until the age of fifty, I was treated and nurtured like the child of the Ashram. I was even fondly addressed by the Old Devotees as ‘*Kuzhandhai Swami*’, meaning ‘Child Swami’.

But, it was Yogi Ramsuratkumar who commenced my Ashram life in 1959, when *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer drew my attention to the presence and greatness of this *Siddha Purusha*! It was also Yogiji who wrote the closing chapters of my Ashram life, by truly guiding me and moulding my life with specific spiritual instructions. I share the following moving incident, with a surrendered heart and with an overwhelming sense of profound gratitude to Yogiji.

The eventful day when my friend Anuradha took me to Yogi Ramsuratkumar was a marked milestone in my spiritual life. My life took a ‘U’ turn, a right-about-turn, on that day! I have dealt in detail about the whole event in *Ramana Periya Puranam* (p.450) Look at Yogiji’s powerful guidance:

“Swami! Ganesan is going through a lot of stress with a printing press issue and he wants to commit suicide,” Anuradha blurted out with pain to Yogiji. Pat came the response from him, “Ganesa! What did our master, Bhagavan Ramana, teach us? You have to enquire into the source of thoughts and kill the ‘mind’ and not the ‘body’. The ‘body’ has served you well, all these years. Why take it out on the ‘body’?” I felt cornered and murmured, “Let me then run away from Arunachala.” With a spark of inquisitiveness in his eyes, Yogiji asked me, “Where will you go if you leave Arunachala?” Without taking time to



“.....will you promise to go to Kashi if the problem is solved ?.....”

think, I spontaneously replied, “To Kashi, Swami!” Seizing the opportunity, Yogiji asked me with intense enthusiasm, “Will you promise to go to Kashi if the problem is solved?” I expressed full consent.

As assured, I spent a whole year in 1988-89, very peacefully at the Krishnamurti Foundation of India, Rajghat, Varanasi, the sacred land where Mother Ganga flows. When I returned to Arunachala after that serene period I noticed a marked change in me - I had developed an attitude of detachment to managing the Ashram. Meanwhile, my younger brother, Mani, was managing the Ashram as its administrator. On my arrival, however, Yogiji sent me to Mataji Krishna Bai as she was on her death-bed. Mataji blessed me profusely and made me stay with her for two months in her peaceful presence.

After those two months of spiritual bliss, when I tried to settle down again at the Ashram, a thunderbolt hit me out of the blue: A senior associate in the Ashram office had sent an anonymous letter to all my close and respected friends, which included Swamijis of different Ashrams, in which I was accused of various misdeeds and abused roundly. This totally disturbed my mental poise. An Ashram worker took me to Yogiji. After listening to all the details, Yogiji said, “This is pure poison. Our Lord Shiva became immortal by

swallowing poison. You too have to do it. Swallow this poison, Ganesa! This beggar is with you!” He held my hand with deep affection throughout the time he spent with me. He got a cup of tea, covered it with his hand for a long time and then made me drink it. His words, his touch and his overflowing love, quietened my agitated mind. I returned to the Ashram with a clear heart – with an attitude of indifference to whatever happened in and around me, and determined to serve the Ashram no matter what.



“...Devaki Ma would make a garland of flowers, Yogiji would enjoy wearing it...”

Yet, after a few days, I had to face much bigger and deeper attacks. I started receiving letters from reputed people condemning the whole situation. My mind was so deeply disturbed that I ran to Yogiji again, taking with me all those letters. After listening to the details, Yogiji said, “You remember, this beggar requested you a few days back to swallow the poison. You were kind enough to oblige this beggar. Now, this beggar begs of you, Ganesa, to digest the poison! Digest it! Father’s blessings are fully on you!” He held my hand for two full hours! All the while I was shedding tears. I appealed to him again that I was still deeply upset and disturbed. Yogiji replied, “Adverse situations do afflict *sadhakas*. Lot of insults are hurled upon them. Our ancient works, like *Periya Puranam* and *Thiruvilayadal Puranam* abound with such stories and how when they patiently bore them all, Lord Shiva blessed them and merged them with Himself!” Yogiji continued his tender and affectionate attention on me and added, “You are not the mind, Ganesa! Mind is only a phantom. It is only a bundle of thoughts. Our master, Bhagavan Ramana, guided us to only enquire into the source of thoughts and not to entertain the mind’s wandering



*Yogi Ramsuratkumar offering his obeisances to the Sacred Samadhi Shrine of Sri Bhagavan.
[Yogiji would pointedly draw my attention to Sri Bhagavan's sacred declaration : "**The only purpose of life is to realize the Self. All other activities are waste of time !**"]*

thoughts. There is no mind, at all. Enquire and it will disappear. Release yourself from the clutches of the mind. You are never the mind, Ganesa!"

It is an amazing fact that using the pretext of my 'press problem', Yogiji piled many trials and tribulations on me. And it was he himself who removed them all, then guided me to leave the Ashram and settle down in my house, 'Ananda Ramana'. He was and ever is *Vigna Vinayakar*, the god who creates and removes obstacles. Indeed, it was Yogiji who helped me release myself, free myself, from the bondage to my body and mind. I became calm, like a clean slate!

It was Yogiji who also helped me to settle down at 'Ananda Ramana'. While I was still in the Ashram, he would come early in the morning, take me to 'Ananda Ramana' and give me exclusive *sat sangh* through the entire day. On all those occasions, Yogiji would insist on taking Anuradha too with us to 'Ananda Ramana'. He would tell her, "Ganesa needs help and protection. Let us extend it to him." Soon, Yogiji started bringing famous and reputed persons, like Ilayaraja, the daughter-in-law of a newspaper magnate, famous artists,

Maniyam Selvam, Lee Lozowick and Ma Devaki along with him to spend the whole day. Sometimes, he would even spend two or three days at a stretch in '*Ananda Ramana*'.

He got me familiarized to living alone at '*Ananda Ramana*'. He himself loved '*Ananda Ramana*'. He adored its serenity and kept commenting on how the air there was unpolluted, how the water in the well was like the Holy Ganga and how the birds in the garden were always singing! The way he would pick up a flower, inhale its fragrance, hold it over his eyes, his heart, ask Ma Devaki to make a garland and then, enjoy wearing it around his neck, was always a divine sight!

He would make me read passages from Sri Bhagavan's *Talks, Day by Day* and *Letters* and would pointedly draw my attention to Sri Bhagavan's famous declaration: "The only purpose of life is to realize the Self. All other activities are waste of time!" To stay with Yogiji at '*Ananda Ramana*' was a true spiritual experience, indeed.

Yogi Ramsuratkumar not only guided me spiritually but also, since I was very naive in matters of the world, he guided Anuradha to take care of me and attend to my mundane needs and activities. He fully approved of her building a house – '*Ananda Vana*' -- behind '*Ananda Ramana*' for her son, Sankar. He even insisted on her staying in it for the exclusive purpose of pursuing her spiritual *sadhana* and more especially, for taking care of me.

Soon, Yogiji started building his own ashram. As was his wont, he was intensely involved in it. Whenever I went and stood in front of him, he would say, "Ganesa! We have spent a lot of time together. Go back to '*Ananda Ramana*' and put Sri Bhagavan's teaching into practice all the time." It was Yogiji's constant prodding to share the teaching and put it into continuous practice that reshaped my spiritual life!

There was always the Grace of Sri Bhagavan and the blessings of the Old Devotees, but it was Yogi Ramsuratkumar who moulded my life in many ways. All the travelling and sharing I have done on Sri Bhagavan's Teaching in the U.S.A. and elsewhere, was done on Yogiji's instructions.

"Wherever you go, Ganesa, this beggar is always with you!"

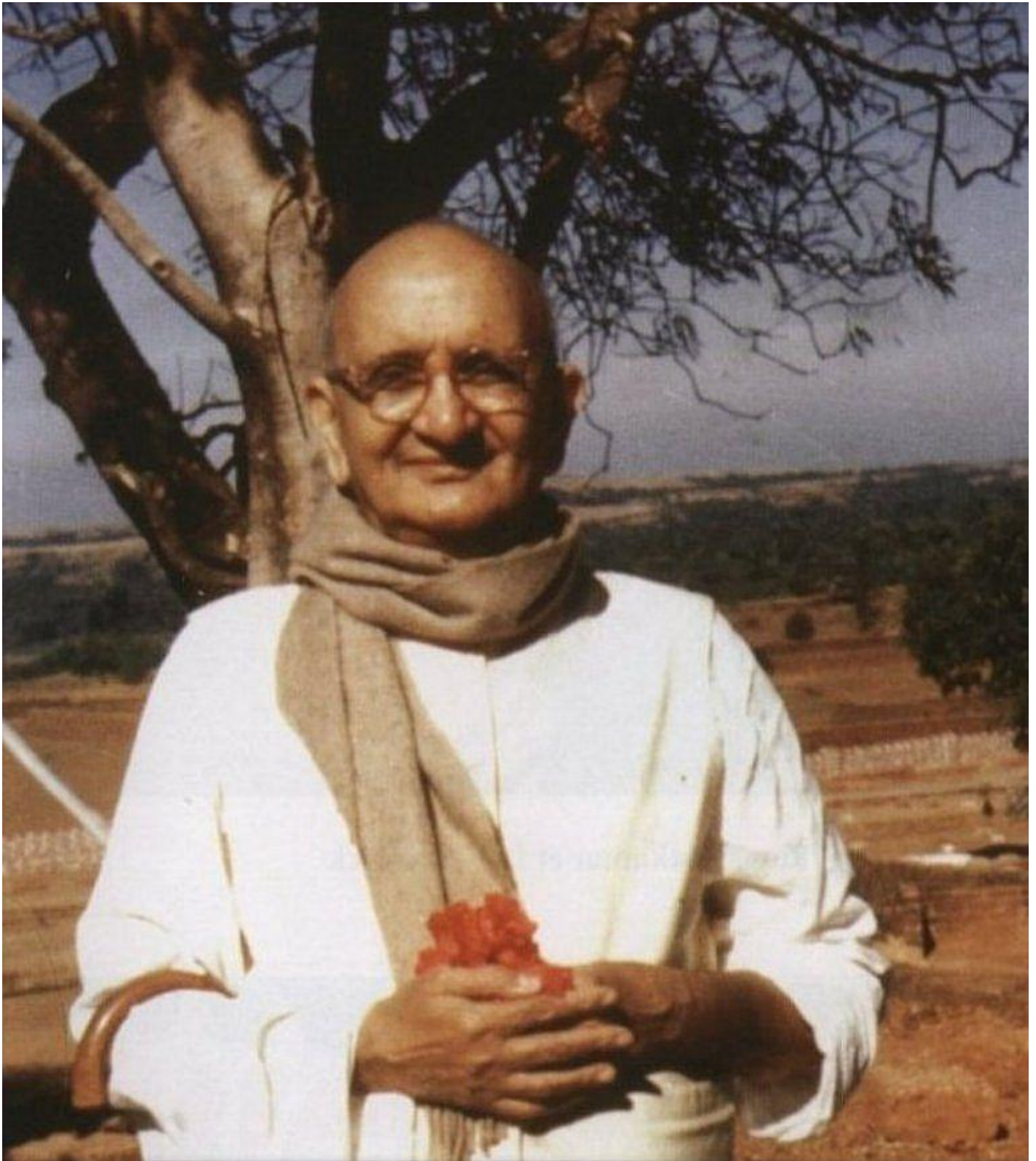
He blessed me, one day, saying, "For everyone else God is everywhere. But, for Ganesa, God is *only* at '*Ananda Ramana*'!"

Thank you, Swami !

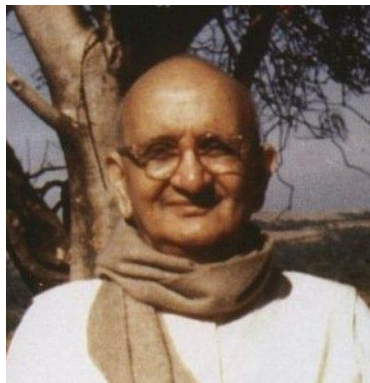
Repeated Prostrations At Your Feet , Swami, From This "Child of Yours" !



".....entrance to '*Ananda Ramana*'....."



SWAMI RAMDAS



Life

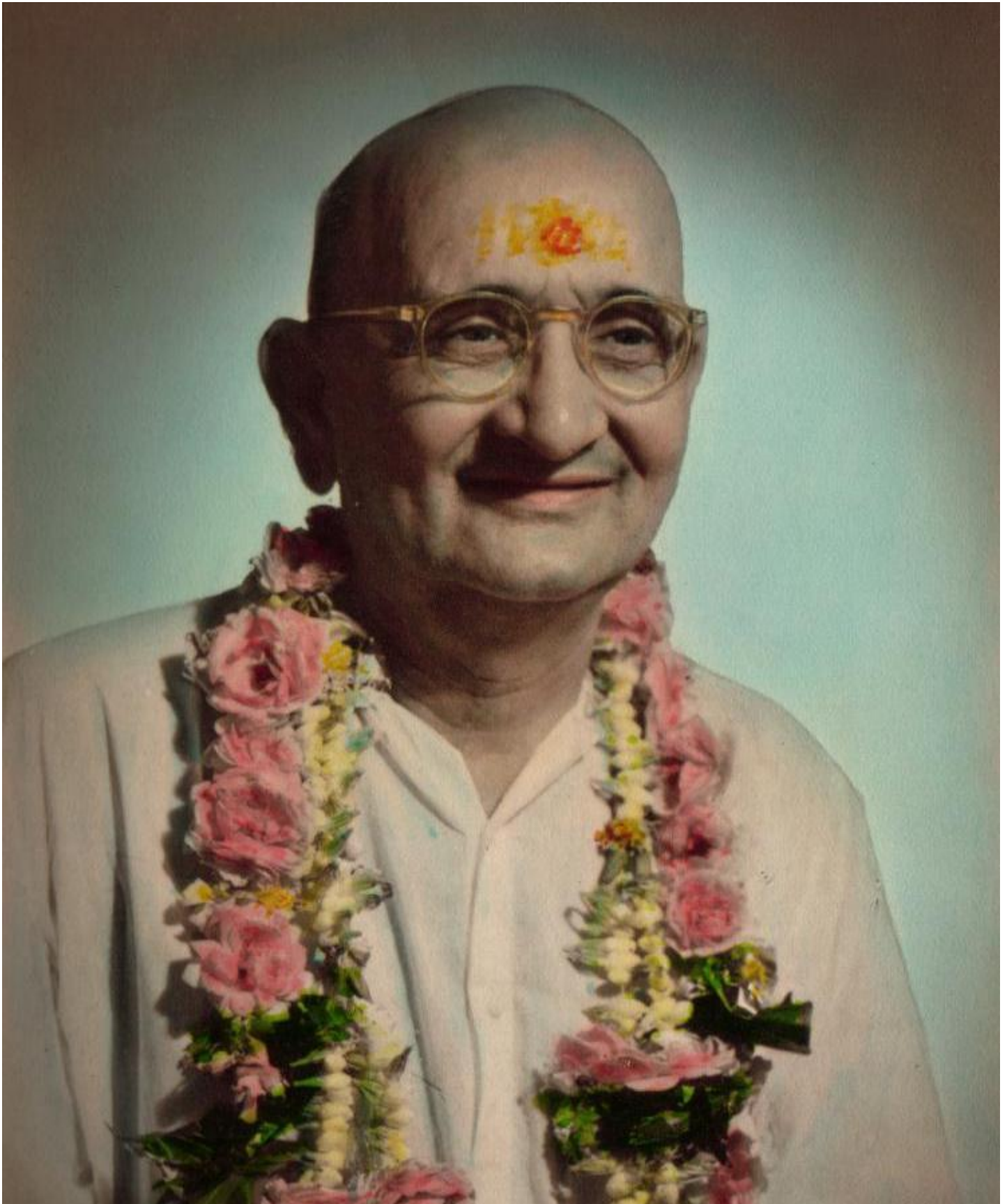
Vittal Rao, was born in Kerala. He was married and lived as a householder until the age of thirty-six. During those times, he had to face many trials and tribulations – both financially and domestically. Those dire conditions made him enquire deeply into the meaning of life. An intense spiritual transformation occurred and he was filled with an overwhelming wave of dispassion. Realising the futility of pursuing worldly pleasures, the thirst for everlasting peace and happiness sprung forth within him.

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ram Thirtha inspired him and he became convinced that God alone could give one eternal peace and pure happiness. Thus, the path of devotion and surrender shone forth for him with an irresistible appeal. All attachments to family, friends, dropped away just as a fully ripened fruit falls away from the tree. Noticing Vittal Rao's waning interest in worldly pursuits and increasing love and devotion towards God, his father initiated him into the Ram *mantra* '*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*'. Vittal Rao intuitively added 'Om' to each repetition of this *mantra* for his *sadhana* and changed it to, 'Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram'.
Ram'.

The *mantra* soon took hold of him. Around December, 1922, he went forth in quest of God as a mendicant *sadhu*. Never accepting money and never planning his journey, Vittal Rao moved around like a dry leaf swept by the wind. At Srirangam, while taking a dip in the holy river Cauvery, he offered his white clothes to the sacred river and took on ochre robes. Prompted by his chosen Lord Ram, he assumed the name 'Ramdas' (meaning, 'servant of Rama'). Ramdas never referred to himself in the first person ever again!

In an anecdote Swami Ramdas describes the state in which he travelled alone or in the company of other *sadhus*. “They travelled to Kalahasti. After a day’s stay there, they left for Jagannath Puri. It was noon. The *sadhuram* and Ramdas were in the train. A Ticket Inspector, a Christian, dressed in European fashion, stepped into the carriage at a small station, and coming up to the *sadhus* asked for tickets. ‘*Sadhus* carry no tickets, brother, for they neither possess nor care to possess any money,’ said Ramdas in English. The Ticket Inspector replied: ‘You can speak English. Educated as you are, you cannot travel without a ticket. I have to ask you both to get down.’ The *sadhuram* and he accordingly got down at the bidding of the Inspector. ‘It is all Ram’s will,’ assured Ramdas to his guide. They were now on the platform and there was still some time for the train to start. The Ticket Inspector, meanwhile, felt an inclination to hold conversation with Ramdas who, with the *sadhuram*, was waiting for the train to depart. ‘Well,’ broke in the Inspector looking at Ramdas. ‘May I know with what purpose you are travelling in this manner?’ ‘In quest of God,’ was his simple reply. ‘They say God is everywhere,’ persisted the Inspector, ‘then, where is the fun of your knocking about in search of Him, while He is at the very place from which you started on this quest, as you say?’ ‘Right, brother,’ replied Ramdas, ‘God is everywhere but Ramdas wants to have this fact actually proved by going to all places and realising His presence everywhere.’ ‘Well then,’ continued the Inspector, ‘if you are discovering God wherever you go, you must be seeing Him here, on this spot, where you stand.’ ‘Certainly, brother,’ rejoined Ramdas, ‘He is here at the very place where we stand.’ ‘Can you tell me where He is?’ asked the Inspector. ‘Behold, He is here, standing in front of me!’ exclaimed Ramdas enthusiastically. ‘Where, where?’ cried the Inspector impatiently. ‘Here, here!’ pointed out Ramdas smiling, and patted on the broad chest of the Inspector himself. ‘In the tall figure standing in front of Ramdas, that is, in yourself, Ramdas clearly sees God who is everywhere.’ For a time, the Inspector looked confused. Then he broke into a hearty fit of laughter. Opening the door of the compartment from which he had asked the *sadhus* to get down, he requested them to get in again, and they did so, followed by him. He sat in the train with the *sadhus* for some time. ‘I cannot disturb you, friends, I wish you all success in your quest of God’. With these words he left the carriage and the train rolled onwards. “O Ram, Thy Name be glorified!”

Swami Ramdas’ journey continued and he found himself in holy Arunachala. There he met Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi for the first time. He fell prostrate at his feet. Knowing that Sri Bhagavan knew English, Ramdas addressed him in that language, “Maharaj, here stands before you, a humble slave. Have pity on him. His only prayer to you is, to give him your blessings.”



Swami Ramdas

About this experience, Swami Ramdas has said “The Maharshi, turning his beautiful eyes towards Ramdas, and looking intently for a few minutes into his eyes as though he was pouring into Ramdas his blessings, nodded his head to say he had blessed. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through the frame of Ramdas -- his whole body quivering like a leaf in the breeze”.

In that ecstatic state he left the Maharshi’s presence and went to spend a few days in a cave on the slopes of Arunachala, constantly chanting the sacred Name of his beloved Ram. This was the first occasion that he went into solitude. During this period of solitude, he never bathed, shaved, or cut his hair. When he ate, he only ate very little. After twenty-one days, when he came out of the cave, he saw a strange, all pervasive light - everything was Ram and there was nothing but Ram.

He describes the revelation: “And, it came one morning - when, lo, the entire landscape changed ! Wherever Ramdas looked, all was Ram, nothing but Ram ! Everything was ensouled by Ram, vivid, marvellous, and rapturous – the trees, the shrubs, the ants, the cows, the cats, the dogs – even inanimate things pulsated with the marvellous presence of the one Ram. And Ramdas danced in joy, like a boy who, when given a lovely present, can’t help breaking out into a dance. And so it was with Ramdas; he danced with joy and rushed at a tree in front, which he embraced because it was not a tree, but Rama himself! A man was passing by. Ramdas ran towards him and embraced him, calling out, ‘Ram, oh Ram!’ The man got scared and bolted. But Ramdas gave him a chase and dragged him to his cave. The man noted that Ramdas had not a tooth in his mouth and so felt a little reassured... at least the loony would not be able to bite him!”

Following his experience at Arunachala, Ramdas continued his travels for another eight years to many parts of India. It was during this time that he had his first experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi* in the *Pancha Pandava Caves* at Kadri in Mangalore.

About this experience it has been written, “For some days, his meditation consisted of only the mental repetition of the *Ram Mantra*. Then, the *mantra* having stopped automatically, he beheld a small circular light before his mental vision which yielded him thrills of delight. This experience having continued for some days, he felt a dazzling light like lightning, flashing before his eyes, which ultimately permeated and absorbed him. Now an inexpressible bliss filled every pore of his physical frame. When this state was coming on, he would at the outset, become oblivious of his hands and feet and gradually his entire body. Lost in this trance-state he would sit for two or three hours. Still, a subtle awareness of external objects was maintained in this state.”

“In these earlier stages, this vision was occasionally lost, pulling him down to the old life of diversity with its turmoil of likes and dislikes, joy and grief. But he would be drawn in again into the silence and calmness of the spirit. A stage was soon reached when this dwelling in the spirit became a permanent and unvarying experience with no more falling off from it, and then the still more exalted state came on: his inner vision projected outwards. First, a glimpse of this new vision dazzled him off and on. This was the working of the divine love. He would feel as though his very soul had expanded like the blossoming of a flower and by a flash, as it were, enveloped the whole universe, embracing all in a subtle halo of love and light. This experience granted him a bliss, infinitely greater than he had in the previous state. Now it was that Ramdas began to cry out, ‘Ram is all. It is He as everybody and everything.’ This condition was for some months coming on and vanishing. When it wore away, he would instinctively go into solitude. When it was present, he freely mixed in the world, preaching the glory of divine love and bliss. With this externalized vision, Ramdas’s mission began. Its fullness and magnificence was revealed to him during his stay in the Kadri cave, and here the experience became more sustained and continuous. The vision of God shone in his eyes and he would see none but RAM in all objects. Now, wave after wave of joy, arose in him. He realised he had attained a Consciousness, full of splendour, power and bliss.”



“Anandashram”

After years of wandering he settled in a small ashram set up by one of his devotees at Kasaragod, Kerala. Eventually, he settled down in Kanhangad, where the present “Anandashram” is situated. He had great reverence for all saints and sages. Whenever he referred to them, he would say that Ramdas was only a child of all the saints. Naturally, he had great respect and reverence for Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

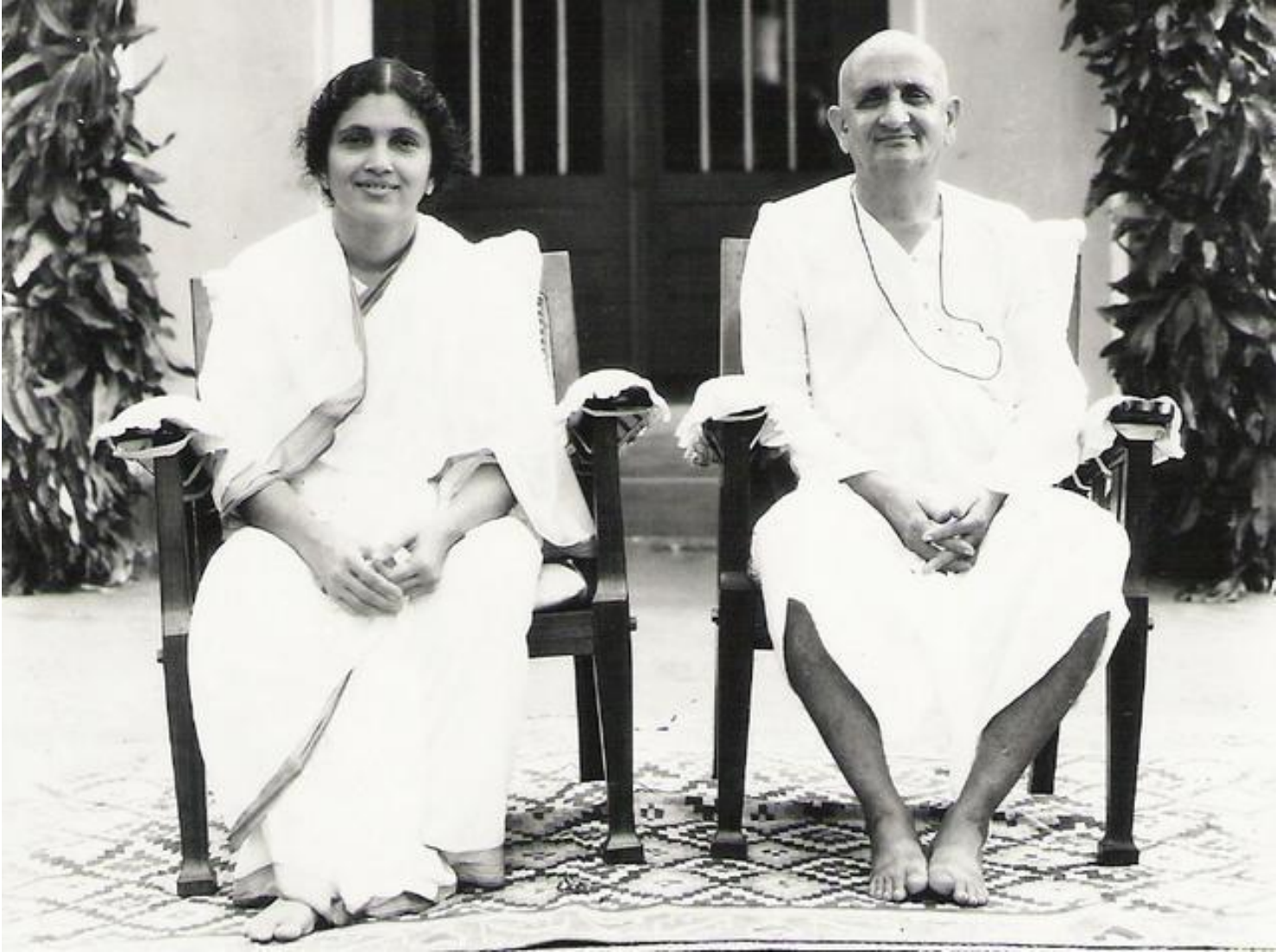
Of Sri Bhagavan he has said: “Sri Ramana Maharishi was in all respects a remarkable saint. After realizing the eternal, he lived in the eternal. His advent was a veritable blessing on the earth. By his contact, thousands were saved from the clutches of doubt and sorrow. He lived what he preached and preached what he lived. He exerted a wonderful influence and created in the hearts of ignorant men and women, a consciousness of their inherent divinity. He awakened the sleeping soul to the awareness of its immortal and all blissful nature. By his very presence, he rid the hearts of people of their base and unbridled passions. The faithful derived the greatest benefit by communion with him.”

As Swami Ramdas had attained realization through uninterrupted chanting of the divine name of Ram along with contemplation on the attributes of God, he always extolled the virtue of *nama-japa* in *sadhana*. Based upon his personal experience, Swami Ramdas assured all seekers that *nama-japa* would lead them to the supreme heights of Realization and Oneness with the Almighty. The greatness of Swami Ramdas was that he converted *Jnana Marga* into full *Bhakti Marga*.

On the power of the Divine Name Swami Ramdas has this to say:

“The Divine Name is pregnant with a great power to transform the world. It can create light where there is darkness, love where there is hate, order where there is chaos, and happiness where there is misery. The Name can change the entire atmosphere of the world from one of bitterness, ill will and fear to that of mutual love, goodwill and trust. For, the Name is God himself. To bring nearer, the day of human liberation from the sway of hatred and misery, the way is the recognition of the supremacy of God over all things and keeping the mind in tune with the Universal by the chanting of the Divine Name.”

In this connection, Sri Bhagavan once told Devaraja Mudaliar, “The Name is God,” and quoted the Bible, ‘In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.’”



Pujya Mataji Krishna Bai and Swami Ramdas

Old Devotees on Swami Ramdas

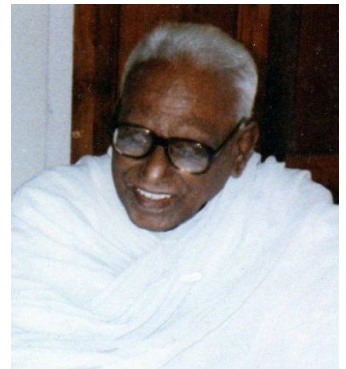
In addition to referring to Swami Ramdas' articles in the "*Vision*" – the journal published from 'Anandashram' -- Sri Bhagavan, would advise *sadhaks* to go to Anandashram and spend some time there in the company of Swami Ramdas. Especially when serious aspirants who did constant *sadhana* at Sri Ramanasramam, felt an inexplicable fatigue at a particular stage in their inner journey and reported it to Sri Bhagavan.

The following are the comments of Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan :

Balarama Reddiar

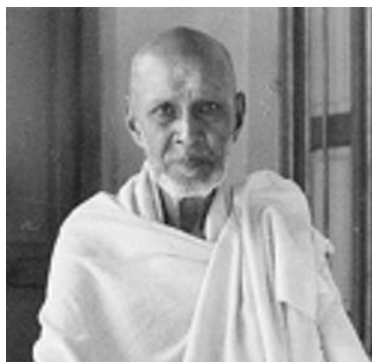
“At the time of my first visit to Swami Ramdas in 1937, his [former] wife had already passed away, but other relatives, including his daughter, would visit the ashram, daily. The Swami would cheerfully move about -- amongst all these family members and devotees -- never putting on the airs of a *sannyasi* or even that of a householder. He treated everyone as part of the same family, in a very natural, affectionate and, above all, detached manner. It was a delight to watch him. He would sit with anyone, in all guilelessness and humility and begin narrating one story after another, all from his personal life and experience. During my first visit, there was only Mother Krishna Bai and two or three *sadhus* living in the ashram. Ramdas would be engrossed in telling me a story or reading from his manuscripts when Mother Krishna Bai would appear with food and feed us.”

“During my first visit, Ramdas was present for only two of the four weeks, I stayed in his ashram. Devotees from Maharashtra were eager to see him and so he had travelled there. After he left, Mother Krishna Bai was kind enough to tell me some stories from her life, describing how she came to Swami Ramdas, and other personal matters. It was all very interesting and elevating. When I returned to Sri Ramanasramam, I received a letter from Anandashram wherein they requested me to write in English all I had heard from Mother Krishna Bai. With full consent from Sri Bhagavan, I did this for them and it was included in her biography.”



Balarama Reddiar

“Not long after that, when I was alone with Sri Bhagavan, he asked me about Swami Ramdas. He wanted to know his daily schedule and, in particular, what Ramdas did in the mornings. It was unusual for Sri Bhagavan to inquire about others in this manner. I told him that someone had suggested to Ramdas that he should daily practise *pranayama* exercise, as it would be good for his health. It involved simply inhaling slowly and deeply, then exhaling slowly, without any breath retention. He was doing this for one hour every morning. I also told Sri Bhagavan, other matters concerning his daily routine. When I visited Swami Ramdas on my return from North India in 1938, I only stayed a few days. Upon leaving, Mother Krishna Bai gave me some food to offer to Sri Bhagavan. The practice of sending food items to Sri Ramanasramam from Anandashram became an established tradition which continues to this day. For Sri Bhagavan’s *Jayanti* celebration, Mother Krishna Bai would send a large quantity of dried banana chips and *kanji*. Even after



Viswanatha Swami

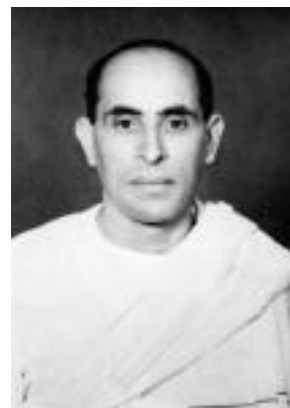
her passing, these generous offerings continue, not only for Sri Bhagavan's *Jayanti* but also at other times."

"Viswanatha Swami was staying at Anandashram at the advice of Sri Bhagavan. After some time, when he was planning to return to Arunachala, Swami Ramdas requested him to translate into Tamil his book, *In the Vision of God*. On his return, he mentioned this to Sri Bhagavan; and, Sri Bhagavan directed him that it would be better to undertake such a literary work in the presence of the saint himself. Hence, Viswanatha Swami stayed at Anandashram and completed the translation of Swami Ramdas' book. After his return to Arunachala, he corresponded regularly with Anandashram, and in the course of this correspondence he wrote about my observing *mauna*. Soon after this he received a letter from Swami Ramdas wherein the Swami wrote, 'Balarama Reddy is observing *mauna*? That is very good. He is a pure soul.' A day or so after this letter arrived; I was entering the ashram early one morning at 5.00 a.m. by way of the stairs on the northern side. One has to ascend a few steps and then descend a similar number of steps which takes you down to the ashram level. These steps take you over the bund beside a small canal bank where water would flow during the rainy season. When I reached the top of the stairs, I met Sri Bhagavan and his attendant proceeding in the opposite direction. I stood aside to let them pass. Sri Bhagavan looked at me and said, 'Viswanathan received a letter from Swami Ramdas: 'Balaram Reddy is observing *mauna*? That is very good. He is a pure soul.' Bhagavan repeated this sentence to me in English."

S.S.Cohen

"I found myself landed in Anandashram in Kanhangad, on the north Kerala coast, of which Swami Ramdas was the presiding deity. I had planned to stay there for a few weeks, but somehow I lingered on for more than eight months."

"Being far from the public road, 'Anandashram' enjoys a natural, quiet and sweet, idyllic simplicity, which made it a congenial retreat at that time for me. So, I liked the place and stayed on, and did my work in my own way. Even the peculiar atmosphere of this ashram suited me in my moods those days. After a short while I began to distinguish the psychical difference between it and Ramanashram, I was greatly amused when I detected the way Swami Ramdas was affecting me. It enhanced the boyish tendencies which had been at times causing me much inconvenience, and which I had been trying to curb – the



S.S.Cohen

loquacity, the hastiness in action, the quickness of temper, the extreme sensitiveness to sound, the bouts of paralysing shyness, etc. I had spent fifteen years (since 1925) in comparative loneliness and silence, but Anandashram drew me out to the spontaneity of my adolescence for a good part of the time I was there.”

“Joy permeated everything: the hills, the grazing cattle, and the very air one breathed – all were joy inspring, all Ramdas’s RAM. In the spiritual life of some devotees what counts most is genuine *bhakti*, irrespective of labels and nomenclature, and Anandashram was, no doubt, surcharged with it, but it was a *bhakti* which was nurtured by joy. Joy and love oozed out of every pore of Swami Ramdas’s being and infected his neighbourhood.”

Swami Ramdas was always in a state of bliss and yet exceptionally simple and practical in his day-to-day life. He enthralled the devotees with meaningful stories which helped them in their *sadhana*. ”

Humour of Swami Ramdas

THE DEVIL AND THE POLE

A man wanted to propitiate a devil to make it do whatever he wanted. So, he did the necessary *sadhana* to that end and, by the power of some *mantra*, he was able to summon the devil before him. The devil said that it would obey his commands, but on one condition, “If at any time you do not give me work, I will devour you. You must keep me engaged all the twenty-four hours.” The man agreed. He immediately gave an order to build a Palace for him. To his great wonder, the Palace was built in no time ! Then, he gave an order for a long road to be made ready. That work was also executed in a short time ! Next minute, the devil was standing before him, asking for more work. The man had no time even to think. He gave an order to build a big town. It was ready within ten minutes !

Now, the man was perplexed and fear gripped him. He did not know what new orders to give the devil. If he did not give any work, he would be eaten up. He hastened to a Sage and asked for advice. The holy Sage suggested that he might get a bamboo pole, plant it in the ground and ask the devil to climb it up and down, until further orders. He did so and the devil was bound to carry out the order. This meant no rest whatever for the devil. Finally it got disgusted and ran away !

In our case, “*Ram Mantra*” is the pole and our ‘ego’ is the devil that teases us.

Ask him to go up and down the pole repeatedly and he will soon get tired and run away !

“*Ram Nam*” is given to you in order to subdue the ‘ego’. The ‘ego’ must be made to disappear by its own endeavour.

PAPA RAMDAS AND ME

It was the first time that I was leaving Sri Ramanasramam to go to another ashram. Carrying within my heart the sacred instruction of my teacher *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer: 'Meet Swami Ramdas', I darted straight like an arrow to Swami Ramdas at Anandashram, in 1960. It was late in the evening when I reached that serene ashram. A *sannyasi* came near me and putting his arm around my shoulders told me, "You do not know me. But, I know you very well, through K.K. Nambiar!" Later, I came to know that he was the ever-cordial, ever-smiling and ever-affectionate Swami Satchidananda, the ever-working human machine of Anandashram! He continued, "Come! I will take you to Papa." Just as Sri Ramana Maharshi is always addressed by all as '*Bhagavan*' (meaning, "God"), Swami Ramdas is ever referred to by all as '*Papa*' (meaning, "Father").



Swami Satchidananda standing beneath 'Panchavati'

Papa Ramdas, was in a room seated on an easy-chair, with his legs stretched on a stool in front of him. I prostrated to him and put my head on his sacred feet. When I raised my head, I saw Papa holding his right hand up, and pointing at something. Since I was immersed in happiness, by merely touching his holy feet, I didn't make any effort to see what he was pointing at. Papa then told me, "If you want to say something to me, come here at seven tomorrow morning and we shall talk it over. Now, go and take rest!"

Next morning at 6.45, I was seated alone in that same room. While waiting for Papa, I started looking around. Its walls looked clean, clear and bright. There were no photos, except one of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. I was thrilled to realise that Papa was pointing at it while I was prostrating to him the earlier evening. I remembered my teacher *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer telling me that Swami Ramdas got Self-Realisation in the

presence of Sri Bhagavan. No wonder that Papa had only one photo in his room - that of Sri Bhagavan! While I was drenching myself in such thoughts, Papa came in. There was no one

else in the room. He looked at me enquiringly. I said, “Swami! I want to talk to you about some personal matters!” Even before I could complete my sentence, Papa interrupted with all kindness, “Then, you should go to *Mataji*. She will deal with you!” And, with one of his glorious, famous smiles, he dismissed me!

I spent a few weeks at Anandashram. Under Mataji’s instruction, I sat at the feet of Papa Ramdas when he held *sat sanghs* in the mornings, evenings and nights. Swami was tenderly affectionate towards me.

I want to share two incidents from among the many glorious ones that took place in those *sat sanghs*.

During one evening *sat sangh*, I was seated at the feet of Swami Ramdas, in the grove of five trees called *Panchavati*. An old devotee of Papa had arrived that morning along with his mother. He sat at the other side of Papa’s easy chair and poured his heart out, “Papa! All say that God exists. You too give absolute importance to it. Saints like Meera Bai, Tukaram and Namdev, among others, claim that they have seen God in the form of Krishna, Vittal, Rama, Panduranga. I am an ignorant family man. I am constantly confronted with this one doubt - is there truly a God?” Papa smilingly confirmed it with a nod of his head. To this the devotee countered, “If so, Papa, can you show me God? Just one God! Can I, with my naked eyes, see at least one God?”

Papa assumed a serious stance and roared, “Why just one God? I can show you, right now, here, three, Gods. Gods you can see with your own eyes.” Everyone around was spell bound!

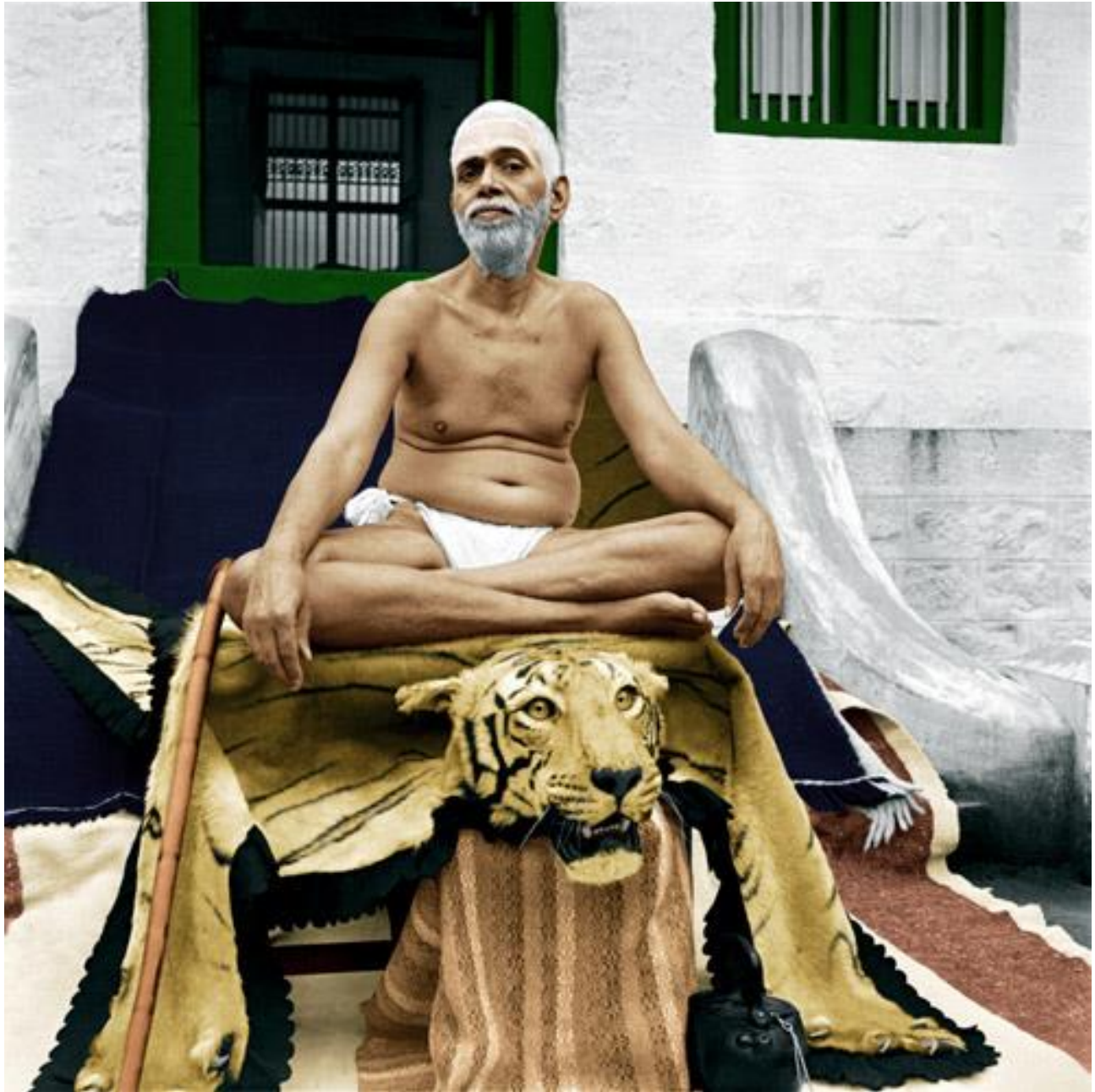
Resuming his usual smiling and joyous attitude, Swami said, “Who is God? The true God is the life sustainer! Right now, you can see the “Sun” in the sky, next is your “own mother”, and the third is there the “cow”, grazing in the fields. Without the sun, not even a blade of grass can grow. Your mother gave you life. And the cow gives life to innumerable beings. So, all the three are Gods -- Gods who can be seen by anyone who has the eyes to see.” I was thrilled by Swami’s outpouring on the living, visible God!

Another day, another long standing devotee of Swami Ramdas visited Anandashram. As usual, I was seated at the feet of Papa. This gentleman asked, “Papa! By your Grace, my *sadhana* of chanting ‘Ram Nam’ is going on meticulously. Again by your Grace, I have no other material or family problems. Everything is going on smoothly, by your Grace. Yet! Sometimes, while immersed in doing *japa*, a bout of depression overpowers me, plunging me into dense darkness. No matter what I do, I could not get rid of it. Why should it happen? What is it? What should I do to get over it?”

Swami Ramdas kept quiet for a short while, then gave a broad smile and said, “It is a process of spiritual purgation. Your stored up *vasanas* are struggling to leave you. You cannot and should not do anything about it except allow it to happen. This is an aspect of the inner struggle that happens in the process of progressing spiritually. During these times, start reading about the life of a saint. But a word of caution, do not, I repeat, do not read his or her teachings. Simply details about his or her life! Reading about saint’s life has the power to totally remove the stagnation caused by stored up *vasanas*. In fact, every saint lives only for the benefit of yearning *sadhakas*!”

I felt elated - Swami Ramdas on that day opened an inner door in my own struggle to progress spiritually. It was on that day that I understood the significance of the life led by every saint, that the life of a saint is just as important as the saint’s teaching.





MY BELOVED BHAGAVAN

By Swami Ramdas

What shall I say of Him who towers high,

A veritable Everest of spiritual Glory,

A resplendent Sun who sheds Light on all.

He is our soul, our life and sole refuge.

The Sage par-excellence dwells on the Sacred Hill,

Arunachala, the abode of holy ones, the Rishis.

His compassionate eyes pour forth nectar on all He sees,

Drowning us in a sea of joy and ecstasy.

Our lives are aflame with Divine Wisdom

At a moment's touch of His world-redeeming feet.

He is God Himself who walked on earth.

His Grace and delight enter our hearts,

Transforming us into His beauteous image.

He belongs to the dizzy heights;

Still He stands firm on the earth of ours

To redeem and save those who behold

His face reflected in the mirror

Of His toe-nails, which glow with celestial radiance.

The care-worn go to Him and become

Free and cheerful like children at play.

The earnest aspirants approach Him

To return deeply permeated with Knowledge Eternal.

Verily, to be in His presence is to know

All that exists is Himself, His grandiose being and form.

His unfailing power of love is most potent;

How He draws me to Him is a mystery.

***O Lord ! Like a rudderless boat adrift
On that vast ocean of the world, I wandered
Hither and thither seeking in darkness
The Supreme Light and Goal that liberates life
From galling bondage and depthless sorrow.
Lo ! Thy Grace drew me to Thy feet
And I came to Thee a vagrant and a beggar.
Thy very sight was burning with the all-consuming
fire of the world.
The instant my head touched Thy holy feet
The fever of my soul left me for ever.
I felt lightness and freedom and peace;
Then Thine eyes, redolent with Thy Infinite Grace
Tenderly looked on me and I was thrilled.
I stood before Thee, a figure of pure bliss,
Fully bathed in Thy Divine Halo.
Now, I am Thy child, free and happy.
My face is suffused with smiles drawn from Thee.
My life is entirely enlightened
With Thy Love, Knowledge and Power.
Thou art my Mother, Master and Friend, my only Beloved.
All glory to Thee !
All glory to Thee !***



MATAJI KRISHNA BAI



Life

Krishna Bai was born in 1903. Since she was born after the loss of their first two children, her parents loved her deeply and affectionately called her “*Kutti*” (meaning, ‘Baby’).

From her childhood Krishna Bai had great love for God. She would sing before the pictures of God, and become so completely absorbed that she would forget everyone and everything. Many a time she would talk to God - even when she was not in front of the pictures - unmindful of others making fun of her.

When she was four years old, she happily helped her mother and others in their chores. She also never felt jealous about anybody and various incidents from her childhood proved it time and again.

She lost her father when she was eight years old and was deeply affected by his passing away. Her maternal uncle took over the running of the household. A few years later, Kutti married Lakshman Rao. Living in penury, and still inwardly grieving her father’s death, Krishna Bai’s wedding gave her no joy.

Sometime after her marriage, she joined her husband in Bombay where they lived happily for a while. However, one shock after another came. Her husband passed away and other domestic troubles from her maternal uncle cropped up. Although she was well taken care of by her husband’s elder brother and his wife, she still felt like an orphan. Her two sons : Narayan and Ganesha had to be well taken care of, as well.

She and her sister-in-law used to visit Swami Ramdas regularly and it was in 1928 that Swami Ramdas accepted her as his disciple. She describes how it felt to visit with

Papa Ramdas, “O Mother Papa! As I neared your ashram, I experienced a rare and inexpressible joy, similar to what a child would feel when it was about to meet its mother after a long period of separation. Thenceforward, I began visiting the ashram for your *darshan* daily in the company of friends.”



Mataji Krishna Bai

Swami Ramdas

Swami Satchidananda

With her devotion growing day by day, she was initiated by Swami Ramdas into the holy *mantra* : ‘**Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.**’ He made her give up reading the scriptures, like *Eknath Bhagavat* and *Jnaneswari* ; and, got her to repeat the *mantra* with a rosary, day and night. He further instructed her to consider all thoughts that arose in her mind and whomsoever she beheld only as Ram Himself. He guided her on how to offer to Ram all actions performed by the limbs of body and the senses. Her intense longing for a ‘*Guru*’ was thus fulfilled.

The transformation that happened to her after being with Swami Ramdas has been described by her: “Accepting you as my central object of adoration, I learnt to love the entire universe. I was prepared to extend my love towards all beings and treat them with kindness, patience and forgiveness. As my vision expanded, I came to love all people and creatures in the world; and, my attachment to my husband and other members of his family disappeared. Later, when I renounced my attachment to all my kith and kin, by your will, I dedicated my body, mind, and all that I called my own to you, who is all and beyond all. Ultimately, you made me renounce myself, your form and the entire cosmos; and, I became one with the eternal Truth beyond name, form and movement. This spiritual summit I reached, through your infinite Grace.”

Papa Ramdas asked her to compose songs like Saint Mirabai and others. To that, Krishna Bai did not agree. A short talk that ensued then, between Papa and Krishna Bai is very illuminating:

"In that case what do you want to be like?" She replied, "I do not wish to be like anybody." To this he asked, "Do you wish to be like Ramdas?" She replied, "I don't want to be like you, a guru carrying on the work as you do. I want to be one with your eternal and infinite Being; and, know 'you and I' are one. Besides, nobody should know that I have realized your immanent and transcendent Being."

Whenever devotees invited her to their house to talk about Papa Ramdas, she would join them in their domestic work and would talk about Papa and Ram Nam.

After Papa's *Mahasamadhi* in 1963, it was left to Mother Krishnabai to guide the affairs of Anandashram and minister to Papa's spiritual family spread all over the world. In spite of poor health, she carried on her mission literally serving as a mother to all who came under her spell until she attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1989.

She toiled day in and day out to serve both, devotees as well as the poor and needy. For her, serving others was serving herself. The life she led in Anandashram made her an embodiment of selfless activity and a dynamic expression of multi-faceted divinity. God's compassion, graciousness, forgiveness, purity and peace radiated in her and she came to be venerated by one and all, as "**Pujya Mataji Krishna Bai**" !

SOME QUOTES OF MATAJI KRISHNA BAI

"Whenever you do anything, understand that whomsoever you may serve, it is the Divine Mother you serve. It is She who has assumed all forms."

"If you see greatness in others, the same greatness is in yourself. If you see littleness in others, the same littleness is in yourself."

"We should develop a childlike nature. We should become innocent and pure like children. **Ram Nam** removes all the *vasanas* and makes everything void in us, while reading lends us strength and power to carry on with our *sadhana* until we have developed that childlike nature."



Mataji Krishna Bai



Mataji Krishna Bai and Swami Ramdas

MATAJI KRISHNA BAI AND ME

As shared in the earlier article, it was Swami Ramdas who directed me to Mataji Krishna Bai.

The very first *darshan* of *Pujya* Mataji sent quivers of joy in me! I didn't know - and no one told me at that time - that Mataji was a saint herself. I was to know about it only later. So, the experience of sanctity, serenity and saintliness in her presence that I felt, was not my mental projection – it was pouring out from her in a most natural way. I am making a specific mention of this only to confirm to fresh seekers that divinity, sanctity and saintliness exist in these extraordinary personalities, independently of one's perception based on information derived from books or from fellow-seekers.

Pujya Mataji was not well. One, Dr. Leelavati, who was attending on her, was with her. Swami Satchidananda introduced me to Mataji. Mataji looked at me, with all affection, love and compassion, and said: “Child! What can I do for you?” I replied: “Mataji! I have problems and I need your help!” She looked surprised and said: “Then, why did you come to me? You should have gone to Pujya Papa.” Now, it was my turn to be surprised. I felt, “What is this? Are they playing football with me?” Bewildered, I replied “But, Mataji! It was Papa who sent me specifically to you!” She asked, “What did he say?” I repeated what Papa had told me, “Then, you should go to Mataji. She will deal with you.”

I saw a pleasant, but tremendous change coming over Mataji. She became still, silent and stood like a rock for a few moments, and then poured forth the following glorious words of ‘*abhayam*’ (acceptance), “Oh! Pujya Papa has said so and sent you to me. That means I have to take complete charge of you. The entire responsibility of yours has thus been entrusted to me. Yes! I am taking over you!” For some time, a steady flow of silence permeated all around. Coming back to her normal poise, she said, “I am not well now. So, come here at four in the evening, when I will be taking a walk here. Then, we shall talk.” Mataji turned to Dr. Leelavati and told her to be there at that time to act as the interpreter between us.

Sharp at four, I was in the long hall. Mataji too entered the hall along with Dr. Leelavati.

I prostrated to Mataji, knelt in front of her, and said, “Mataji! I want to talk to you on personal matters.” Mataji looked down at me with love; and, asked me: “Do you understand my Malayalam? I can understand if you talk to me in Tamil. So, Leelavati, you may go!”

After she left, we were alone. To my great and good fortune, Mataji condescended to speak to me for more than an hour. Through it, and Mataji’s Grace, my life was given an entirely different turn; and, I turned over a new leaf.

Still kneeling before Pujya Mataji, I saw her moon-like, peace-showering face turn to me, “Now, child! Tell me, what is your problem?” The powerful, yet homely presence of Mataji overwhelmed me, with awe and ecstasy and hence it took some time for me to gather all my faculties to reply. “Mataji! I have come away from the world to the austere life of an ashram, for good. I took the decision myself and I am confident now that I would stick to it, at all costs. But, I have two deep doubts: One is, I am now 24 years old and my body and the mind are in excellent condition. I am very firm that I do not want any of the pleasures that money, property, position and power can offer me. I have not an iota of doubt about it at all. But, after 10 or 15 years, I do not know whether I will continue to have such complete

hold on my physical and mental condition. So, I want to know whether my decision to lead a spiritual life is correct or not. If not, I would now itself switch back to the life of the world, instead of going back to it after so many years. I pray, Mataji, please give me a clear direction, in this regard. The second is, having come to live in the Ashram and having taken to *sadhana* so early in life, I sought the advice and guidance of senior devotees of Sri Bhagavan, who live in and around the Ashram, to tell me what should be my *sadhana*. Each one advised me differently. One said, ‘Learn Sanskrit’, another, ‘Sit in meditation in the Old Hall for an hour in the morning and in the evening’, yet another, ‘Chant the *Vedas*, along with the *Veda Pathasala* boys’ ‘Go away from the Ashram; wander all over India, meet Sages and Saints; remaining inside an institution amounts to the bird with wings enclosing itself inside its mother’s nest’. When they were telling me, I knew very well that they were very sincere. Yet, none of what they said went in. Not that I was resisting them, but not one of them got assimilated into my system. The puzzle continues. So, Mataji! I want you to guide me as to the nature of *sadhana* that I have to seriously adhere and observe, if your answer to my first question is ‘yes!’”

Pujya Mataji seemed very pleased, since while listening to me, all the time, her most beautiful face was glowing and she showered on me a nectar-like smile. She bent down and touched my head and said: “Child! I bless you! In the very beginning itself, I want to correct you, correct your understanding. Your understanding is raised on the wrong foundation. Rectify it now itself, in my presence. So that you can follow rightly what I am going to tell you. You repeatedly said: ‘I have chosen’, ‘I have come away’, while talking about your decision to take up *sadhana* and to lead an ashram life. Have complete faith and conviction that it is not you who have chosen the spiritual life, but it has been chosen by the Lord. You have no other choice but to implicitly obey it and follow it! With this basic, right foundation of conviction, listen to me. You are on the right track. Since you need an assurance, I guarantee that you will succeed in your *sadhana* and you will not swerve from the path until you attain your goal. I will guide you and protect you. Pujya Papa has invested me with that duty. So, don’t worry! Go ahead, never look back!”

After some time, she continued, “As for your second question, none of the advice given by others suited you, for the simple reason, that none of them were meant to be your mode of *sadhana*! Your *sadhana* is to get back those Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan who have moved away from the Ashram after Sri Bhagavan’s *mahanirvana*. They are all scattered across many towns, cities and their native places. Beseech them, convince them that the abode of the Master alone is their place of stay and bring them back to the ashram. Then, look after them, make their stay comfortable, and thus attend on them, one-pointedly. They have all sacrificed their personal lives of comfort, power, position and pleasures for the sake of living in the proximity of the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan. Now, you should extend

all these to them, with respect, love and tender care. This is your *sadhana*. Do it diligently.” She took a break and rested a while. But my mind, in that split second, manufactured a thought.

Pujya Mataji gave me a mischievous smile and stroked my head, and said: “I know! While you were prepared to do all these, your mind raises the question: ‘What about my spiritual *sadhana*?’ Isn’t it? When you do this precious service to the Old Devotees, one-pointedly, joyously, diligently and continuously, all the stages in your *sadhana*, will get fulfilled automatically at the appropriate time. Don’t worry over it. That is my responsibility. I have taken full charge of you and as such I will be guiding you, through and through!”

Again, there was a break. And, again, my mind quickly mulled over the thought, “We both will soon be separated by hundreds of miles away. She can’t come to Arunachala and I don’t know whether I will come again to Anandashram. How is she going to guide me, in my day-to-day life, which I feel is very essential to me at that fluid stage of my *sadhana* ?” Like lightening, she pounced on me, and said with great compassion, “My guidance will continue even when you are far away from me. Poor child! Have faith. My guidance will protect you throughout your life. You will yourself realise this as time moves on. Anyhow, for your immediate understanding I shall explain how I will guide you. If anyone comes to you and advises you -- unasked by you -- take it that, that advice comes from me. Likewise, if something is taken away from you -- unasked -- don’t resist - it is I who is removing it from you. I will do both these for your betterment and spiritual growth. Now, I want to give you a foretaste of what I am going to do for you. Do you have any money with you?” I took out a hundred rupee note. She continued, “Hold it in front of your face. From now on money will not affect you. While you will know its value, I am wiping out from your system the power of money to grip you. You will no longer be corrupted by money power!” I instantaneously felt it drop away from me. From then until today, I have lost the capacity to know the real worth of money!

She walked a little and again came to me and said: “I have answered your questions. Now, I want to tell you something of myself. This is to put you on the right track of successful *sadhana*. Listen to it carefully!”

I was thrilled that Mataji had condescended to guide me. I still feel that it is Sri Bhagavan’s Grace that enabled me to deserve the supremely important words of wisdom and practical guidance that Pujya Mataji showered on me.

She continued, “*Sadhana* is not a means to an end. *Sadhana* is not a means to a goal. It is both the means and the goal. It is like sports coaching: The pupil is initially told ‘not to do this’, ‘not to hit the ball outside the court’ - only to focus the pupil’s attention on what exactly, has to be done by the pupil. Here too, the *sadhana* is introduced to the seeker as a means towards a goal. Since the goal itself is already there, that is, your own SELF, how can there exist another goal, other than the one who is striving? So, the *sadhana* is merely an initiation to plunge within and be the goal. That is why it is said, ‘The beginning itself is the end’. The SELF in its assumed state of ignorance should do *sadhana* to attain the goal of perfection. Sages also go along with such ignorant *sadhaks* and say, ‘Yes’, ‘yes’, go ahead. Be diligent in your *sadhana*. Then only you will attain the goal!’ It is all God’s *Leela*! So, be serious with your *sadhana*—it is the beginning, end and the fulfillment of your life’s crowning glory!”



Mataji engaged in domestic work

“Learn to use only positive terms. Never use negative terms, like, ‘No’, ‘I wouldn’t’, ‘I can’t’, etc. Be conscious and use an alternative, positive expression. Instead of saying ‘I can’t do it’, say, ‘I will try to do it’. Negativity, in any form, is the realm of the mind; it always pulls you down -- slowly but surely. In positivity, acceptance and responsibility are thrust on you. People, usually, shun taking burdens. A spiritual aspirant should be prepared, at all times, to own responsibility, for, the whole purpose of creation is for the Lord to play His *Leela*. Be a part of it! Have a positive attitude and use only positive answers and terms – be vigilant about it. Such adherence to positivity will, in the natural course, build in you strength, humility, simplicity and perseverance – very essential qualities for progress towards the Truth, inwardly.”

“Never look back to the past. Always be in the ‘Now’. Likewise, don’t be endlessly planning or dreaming about the future. Trust the *Guru*. Have faith in the path you have been blessed with. Pay all attention to your *sadhana*. *Sadhana* is done always in the ‘Now’ – be conscious of this important instruction. Past thoughts and future desires intrude into the ‘Now’ and rob you away from peacefully plunging into *sadhana* – be it *japa*, *Atma Vichara*, *puja* or *parayana*. While in the ‘Now’, i.e., while doing any of these *sadhanas*, never allow the thoughts about the past or future to arise, to intrude into you.”

“When a vacuum is created, nature’s law is that air should rush in and fill it up, instantaneously. Similarly, when through total attention on *sadhana* one is plunged in the

‘Now ’, which is equivalent to creating a vacuum, since the ‘Now ’ is ever devoid of the contents of memory and desires, these outsiders in the form of past and future thoughts force themselves into the ‘Now ’. That is why *sadhakas* are ever faced with the apparent insurmountable struggle against the invading thoughts, especially when one progresses in *sadhana*. *Guru’s* Grace alone will help the true *sadhaka* to win over these invaders and remain in the silence of the ‘Now ’. Therefore, before sitting for meditation, prostrate to your *Guru* (or picture of the *Guru*), take his name and pray for his blessings, protection and guidance, and then plunge into Self-Enquiry. You will then see how effortlessly you will be established in the ‘Now ’, with great ease too! *Guru, Guru and Guru alone IS – you are not!*”

“Be always generous. The giver is ever God only. No human being is capable of producing any of the life-giving commodities. From this, you should understand clearly that the giver is God alone. Such clarity will equip you with the inner strength to give away things; and more importantly, not to cling to material objects. By assuming this attitude of positive giving, one of the stoutest obstacles in the progress of *sadhana* – attachment – is triumphed over with effortless ease! Take delight in giving, generously. All religions, therefore, preach charity and giving alms, as vital virtues. Be conscious of the need to be generous, as one of the most important traits for progress in *sadhana*.”

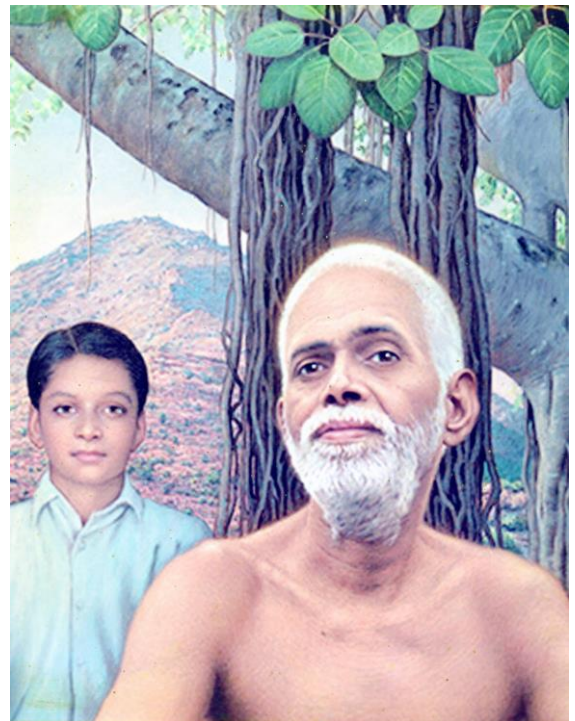
“Accept things as they come. Lead a simple life. By this, I do not advocate austerity. At your young age, you should enjoy life in all its wholeness. Do as you please, but with the string—‘Will Mataji approve of this?’—attached to every one of your desires. This will help you decide for yourself, without a hitch, whether the desire is to be fulfilled or to be rejected. Try to live from the heart and not merely through the head. Remember, the intellect acts merely as a safety-valve – it helps to reject the unreal, thus preventing calamities and disasters, that’s all. It can never lead you to the Reality. Whereas if you follow your heart, you will never falter, for, it is the *Inner Voice*, it is the intuition, it is the divine which activates the heart! Its dictates are based on compassion, love, tolerance and sacrifice. Intellect will urge you to always be the winner, the gainer. The heart, on the other hand, will embrace you even if you are a loser in upholding noble causes. Be a loser, never aspire to be a gainer, for, the eternal law is that those who lose will ultimately gain!”

“Since you are related to the Maharshi, the greatest *Jnani* of our times, people will try to brainwash you, saying, ‘Seven generations before and seven generations after a *Jnani* is born in a family, will get liberation automatically!’ Don’t believe it. The whole of humanity is the family of a *Jnani*. Without doing *sadhana* no one will attain Self Realisation. Being born in the family of a *Jnani* is most certainly most fortunate. People will respect you, adorn you with material things, praise you, adore you and even worship you.”

“But remember, none of these will take you even an inch forward in your inward journey towards the attainment of Self Realisation. Be ever conscious of this simple truth - it will save you from the biggest pitfalls of being born in a *Jnani's* family.

” Refrain from projecting yourself as a ‘somebody’. No one need know that you are a seeker. Look normal; do *sadhana* unknown to the eyes of others. Keep it as a secret and preserve it as a precious jewel. Has not Sri Bhagavan said, ‘*There are no others*’ ? It only means that you alone count as far as *sadhana* is concerned. The *Guru* knows the sincerity and depth of your *sadhana*. What other form of recognition should you seek? The *Guru* guides you both from outside and inside. No other aids are necessary. Nothing but *sadhana* should matter to you. To preserve the purity of progress, one needs this defence mechanism of not projecting oneself as a spiritual seeker. Become a ‘nothing’. Be a ‘nobody’. When you thus empty yourself, it is easy for the *Guru* to come and occupy your heart, thereby guiding you from within, which is the mark of ultimate progress in one’s spiritual path. Has not Sri Bhagavan repeatedly affirmed; ‘*Be simple, be humble and be natural*’ ? These are the three supremely noble traits a true seeker should aspire for and be rooted in, forever!”

“Finally, I want to assure you that your *Satguru* is *Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*. You are fortunate to have the greatest *Jnani* as your *Guru*. Hold on to him, cling firmly to his holy feet. Never swerve away from him. Never go searching for any other *Guru*. If you really get rooted in your *Satguru*, it will be his duty to ripen you spiritually. It can also be by his sending you to learn from other masters. You yourself do not have to make any effort to go to other masters. You will be taken to other masters when the need arises - but it is *not* your concern. Unasked you will be led to other masters - don’t resist any such move when it occurs. Once you have totally surrendered to the *Satguru*, he guides you through and through. Who do you think sent you here? It is Sri Bhagavan alone! Is Puja Papa other than Sri Bhagavan? Why did Puja Papa send you to me? Who is Mataji Krishnabai but Puja Sri Bhagavanji? Has not Sri Bhagavan clarified this point by saying, ‘*There are no Jnanis, there is only Jnana*’? Only *Jnana* counts. To make it blossom in the disciple, the same *Jnana* appears as the *Satguru*, and takes him to other masters, who all are also nothing but *Jnana*.



‘Boy’ Ganesan with Sri Bhagavan
(a painting)

But, when you make efforts to go to masters, you will see them only as individuals. But, when the *Satguru* sends you to masters, you will see only *Jnana* and the blessings received from them will also be *Jnana* only. It is the process to ripen you, even without your knowing it consciously! The *Satguru's* workings are often mysterious. But, be assured that it is always for your spiritual advancement!”

“The *Guru* is all important. But, who is the *Guru*? The *Guru* is not just the body, the person whom you see with your eyes. **“The ‘teaching’ is the teacher. The ‘teaching’ is the *Guru*”.** Preserve this secret deep in your heart as the most precious treasure. I bless you, Child! You are already blessed by Pujya Sri Bhagavanji and by Pujya Papa. Rest assured that my protection, guidance and blessings are always on you!”

Like a honey-bee coming out of a lotus flower after having its fill, I got up in all joy and repeatedly prostrated to Pujya Mataji. The nectar that poured forth from her holy mouth, though very precious, could be understood by me in its depth and purity only slowly, as I began to experience every sentence of hers coming true in my life of inward journey towards the Self! I returned to Arunachala, after a few days stay at the peace-filled Anandashram. While taking leave, both Pujya Papa and Pujya Mataji blessed me, profusely.

It is amazing for me to look back and now realise, how for 27 years, after I was so graciously initiated into my mode of *sadhana* by Pujya Mataji, I had no necessity to go back to her and seek any clarification about her divine *upadesa*! This, perhaps, is the proof - if any proof is necessary - of the spiritual strength and power of a true Saint!



Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan blessing the house-warming ceremony of S.P.Mukherjee (1961)

I too meticulously followed her course of guidance, without a single thought of resistance or obstacles. Everything moved so smoothly and so well that there was not a single failure or disappointment in all my efforts. On my return to Sri Ramanasramam, I started gathering details, slowly but steadily, of where all the Old Devotees were scattered. Like a planned programme, I executed the whole scheme, without telling anyone, including my father who was the Ashram President under whom I was working, the instructions imparted to me by Pujya Mataji. Sri Ramanasramam was financially at a very low ebb, and adding more Ashramites would not have been welcomed by the management. Especially when most of all these Old Devotees were either very poor or *sadhus*.

Within a few decades, under the guiding presence of Pujya Mataji, I succeeded in bringing nearly forty Old Devotees back to Sri Ramanasramam. It was purely her Grace that I could look after them and to the best of my ability and capacity, fulfill their needs, which were naturally few and far between. Rooms were built, servants were recruited and medical aid was provided. Most importantly, to support all these, sufficient inflow of donations had to be constantly arranged for! In spite of resistance from some corners of the administration, oft and on, I could successfully look after them well.

While offering my prostrations to Pujya Mataji for guiding me through and through, I also offer my wholehearted salutations to those few friends who were always helpful to me, supporting me and extending unflinching assistance to me, in every way they could for all those years. Obviously, I could not have achieved it by myself! What a great opportunity for me to be in the proximity of those Old Devotees and serve them, who had had the golden privilege of basking themselves in the divine presence of Beloved Bhagavan!

In 1987, I visited Anandashram for an extremely short stay. Again, I received Pujya Mataji's blessings in abundance. Those were the days I was burdened with a very serious problem concerning a printing press. (The details of this have been shared in the chapter on the great *siddha purusha*, Yogi Ramsuratkumar - a direct disciple of Swami Ramdas and Pujya Mataji - in "***Ramana Periya Puranam***", which can be downloaded, free of cost, from the AHAM website) .

It was this same *siddha purusha*, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, who in 1989, directed me to immediately go to Anandashram and be with Pujya Mataji, as long as she wanted me to be with her. He said that she was on her death bed and was calling me. I left for Anandashram the same night. When I reached, Swami Satchidananda was standing underneath the '*Panchavati*' repeating loudly and joyously to himself, "Now, I understand! Now, I understand!" I went and prostrated to him and demanded what he had understood. He replied, "Mataji has been telling me every morning and evening the past one week,

‘Ganesha is coming! Ganesha is coming!’ I used to reply, ‘No, Mataji! Ganesha can’t come. He is definitely not coming!’ She would insist, ‘No! You don’t know, but I know. Ganesha *is* coming!’ I used to leave it at that. Now I understand that she was predicting your coming here. I was under the impression that Mataji was talking about her seventy year old son, Ganesha. He is in a Mental Hospital in Pune and will not be released from the hospital unless Mataji sends them a requisition letter. So, as such, I was positive that Ganesha can’t come. How ignorant we are with our limited and collected knowledge and how wise Saints are! How madly we cling to and assert what little we know! Come, come! We will go and see Mataji!”

Mataji was bedridden and very seriously ill. *Darshan* was restricted to just one hour in the morning, when all stood in a queue to see her. Other than that, men were disallowed to go to her, as most of the time Mataji was simply covered with a thin cloth. Consequently, only women were attending on her.

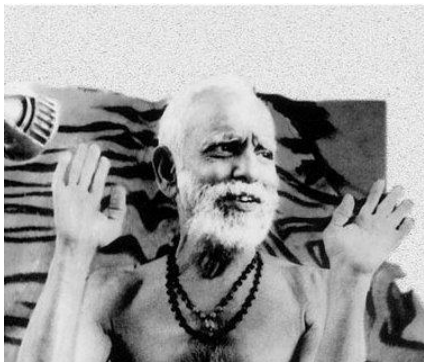
When we entered her room, after giving sufficient advance notice, Mataji welcomed us with a glorious smile! Swami Satchidananda bent towards her and first apologised to her, saying that he now understands what she was telling him every day for the past week. She replied, “I am glad you now understand. Stay always in a state of learning!” She turned to me, and said, “Child! Stay here. Take rest. Come every morning and sit where I can see you.” I was in tears - I could not bear to see Mataji’s body so emaciated, pale and thin. She blessed me by touching my head. What a great blessing, I thought, for my small effort of travelling a few hundred miles! Next morning, when I entered her room, I noticed Mataji had already put a comfortable stool for me to sit near her holy feet where she could see me, all the time even when she was lying down. I felt reluctant to sit on a stool that was at the same height of Puja Mataji’s bed. But she insisted that I sit on the stool.

Every day, when I entered, she would strain herself to see whether the stool was there. She instructed me to observe everything that happened and be watchful and aware all the time I was with her. This was exceptionally kind and gracious of Mataji, for, many eye opening things, for a *sadhaka* like me, did happen.

One day, a bright youngster came along with his mother and told Mataji: “I am an engineer working in a good firm in Bangalore. I am unmarried. Three years ago, I was initiated into a *mantra*, by a reputed *sannyasin*. I have been sincerely chanting this mantra since then. But, it has not given me any spiritual benefit - I am still where I was. But, I have total faith in *japa yoga*. I recently heard about you and that you give initiation into *japa*. I pine from my heart for a *mantra*. Please initiate me into the right one.” Mataji listened carefully and asked him the *mantra* into which he was initiated. He replied: “The Narayana *mantra*,

‘Om Namō Narayanaya’.” “She told him to come the next day at the same time and that she would initiate him into the right *mantra*. Then she added that he should receive it and recite it with all care, attention and sincerity so that it became his own. The next day, when the youngster came, Mataji told him “Repeat the *mantra* I am going to initiate you into three times.” I was following the whole thing eagerly. To my surprise, Mataji gave him the same *mantra* that he was initiated into three years ago - ‘Om Namō Narayanaya’. As I watched, puzzled, I saw the youngster’s face. Even as he repeated the *mantra* after Mataji, with closed eyes, his face brightened up with joy, and ecstasy. He prostrated with all reverence a few times to Mataji. She blessed him with a glorious smile. After they left, Mataji lifted her head a little, looked at me deeply and then gave me a smile of grace and blessings!

Naturally, she should have known that I knew two other similar instances, already. Of course, that is how I would like to interpret Pujya Mataji lifting her head and smiling at me. Therefore, I feel that they too have to be shared here, for the benefit of spiritual aspirants.



Kanchi Sankaracharya

A wealthy Nattukkottai Chettiar came to the great Saint of South India, Kanchi Sankaracharya and told him that he was initiated into the hoary *panchakshara mantra*: **‘Om Namashivaya’** by three different great *sannyasins* on three different occasions. But, though he was sincerely doing its *japa*, there was no benefit. He pleaded with the Saint that he be given a fresh *mantra*, for, he believed only in *Japa Marga*. The *Acharya* told him that he would give him the initiation the next day and that he should come prepared for that and accept the *mantra*, with one-pointed attention and total acceptance.

The next day, the initiation took place. The *Acharya* told him, “The Sankaracharya of the *Kamakoti Peetham* is now initiating you into this *mantra*. Receive it with all reverence.” The *mantra* given was **‘Om Namashivaya’**! The Chettiar received it with such reverence and attention that it started working on him, instantaneously. This Chettiar, we are told, later became a great *Japa Yogi* !

The second instance involves a reputed traditional Ayurvedic physician in Kerala. He was not only respected as an excellent physician, but also revered as a Saint in his region for his upright character, undivided dedication to his profession and effecting an almost one hundred per cent cure to all diseases ! His name was Dr.Moos (He came and examined Bhagavan Ramana’s cancer in the arm and openly expressed, “The body of a *Jnani* is not subject to the laws of ordinary nature. I know I can cure this disease on anyone else. But, I can’t even presume to cure a *Jnani’s* physical ailment, for, its appearance has multi-dimensional reasons – not merely physical alone. Sri Bhagavan Himself knows best. He

has to cure Himself !” After he left, Sri Bhagavan complimented Dr.Moos, as “a man of true knowledge’ and “he knew what he spoke” !)



Dr.Moos (traditional Ayurvedic Vaidhya)

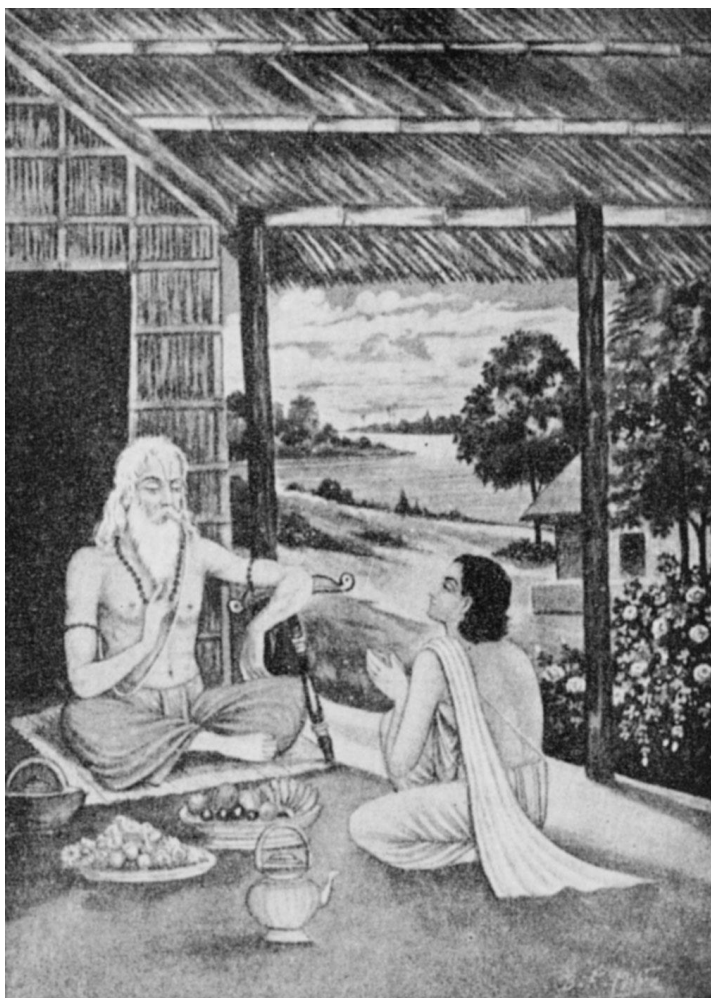
One day, a patient came to him writhing with intense stomach pain. He told the doctor that being a wealthy man, he had gone even to England and taken various treatments. But, nothing helped him. Ultimately, he had started taking only Ayurvedic medicines. He said that he had consulted the best Ayurvedic physicians in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and that none of their treatments could cure him. Dr.Moos examined his pulse and gave him a particular *arishtam* (tibic like medicine). Seeing it, the patient reacted with great disappointment. “Oh, no ! This is the same medicine, all those doctors, in all the three states gave me. No ! It does not work, at all !” Dr.Moos, in a tone filled with authority, power and conviction, commanded : “I, Dr.Moos, am now giving you this *arishtam*. This will cure you. Stay here for three days. Now, take the first dose of it, right now, in my presence !” The patient was cured completely, within those three days !

In this regard, I want to quote the very significant passage in “Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi” wherein Sri Bhagavan clarifies the necessity of the competency of the one who ventures to initiate another into a *mantra*.

[Devotee : “Can anyone get any benefit by repeating sacred syllables (*mantras*) picked up casually ?”

SRI BHAGAVAN : “No. He must be competent and initiated in such *mantras*.” The Maharshi illustrated this by the following story : ‘A King visited his Prime Minister in his residence. There he was told that the Premier was engaged in repetition of sacred syllables (*japa*). The King waited for him and, on meeting him, asked what the *japa* was. The Premier said that it was the holiest of all – *Gayatri*. The King desired to be initiated by the Premier. But, the Premier confessed his inability to initiate him. Therefore, the King learned it from someone else, and meeting the Minister later, he repeated the *Gayatri* and wanted to know if it was right. The Minister said that the *mantra* was correct, but it was not proper for him to say it. When pressed for an explanation, the Minister called to a page close by and ordered him to take hold of the King. The order was not obeyed. The order was often repeated, and still not obeyed. The King flew into a rage and ordered the same man to hold the Minister, and it was immediately done. The Minister laughed and said that the incident was the explanation required by the King. “How ?” asked the King. The Minister replied, “The order was the same and the executor also, but the authority was different. When I ordered, the effect was nil, whereas, when you ordered, there was immediate effect. Similarly with *Mantras*.”]

Guru initiating a disciple into a ‘mantra’





*Commencement of Navarathri celebrations by carrying Mother Yogambal (inset : Mother Yogambal).
- My younger brother V.Subramanian - 'Mani' can be seen on the extreme left -*

Mataji made me stay for a full two months, at Anandashram, with her. During that period many absorbing things happened. Of course, every day, the morning *darshan* and an hour's proximity to Pujya Mataji was my elixir! During the early part of my stay, the *Navarathri* festival was being observed and joyously celebrated all over India. At Sri Ramanasramam, the idol of Goddess Yogambal would be taken out in procession and kept outside its usual inner shrine, where it would be decorated attractively for nine nights to depict various divine aspects of the Holy Mother. After the ninth night, the idol would be carried again in a procession back to the inner shrine. Every year, I used to actively participate in celebrating this festival. I used to take special delight in carrying the idol of the Holy Mother, on both the occasions of bringing it out and taking it back. One day, I got a letter from Sri Ramanasramam that it was the day that the Mother Yogambal was being carried out and that they all would miss me. I was deeply affected over the fact that I would miss that golden opportunity of being one of the carriers of the holy Mother Yogambal. That afternoon, someone came to my room and told me that Mataji was calling me.

When I reached the hall, I saw a chair tied to two long poles and devotees talking excitedly. From one of them I came to know that Mataji, who was bed-ridden, had suddenly

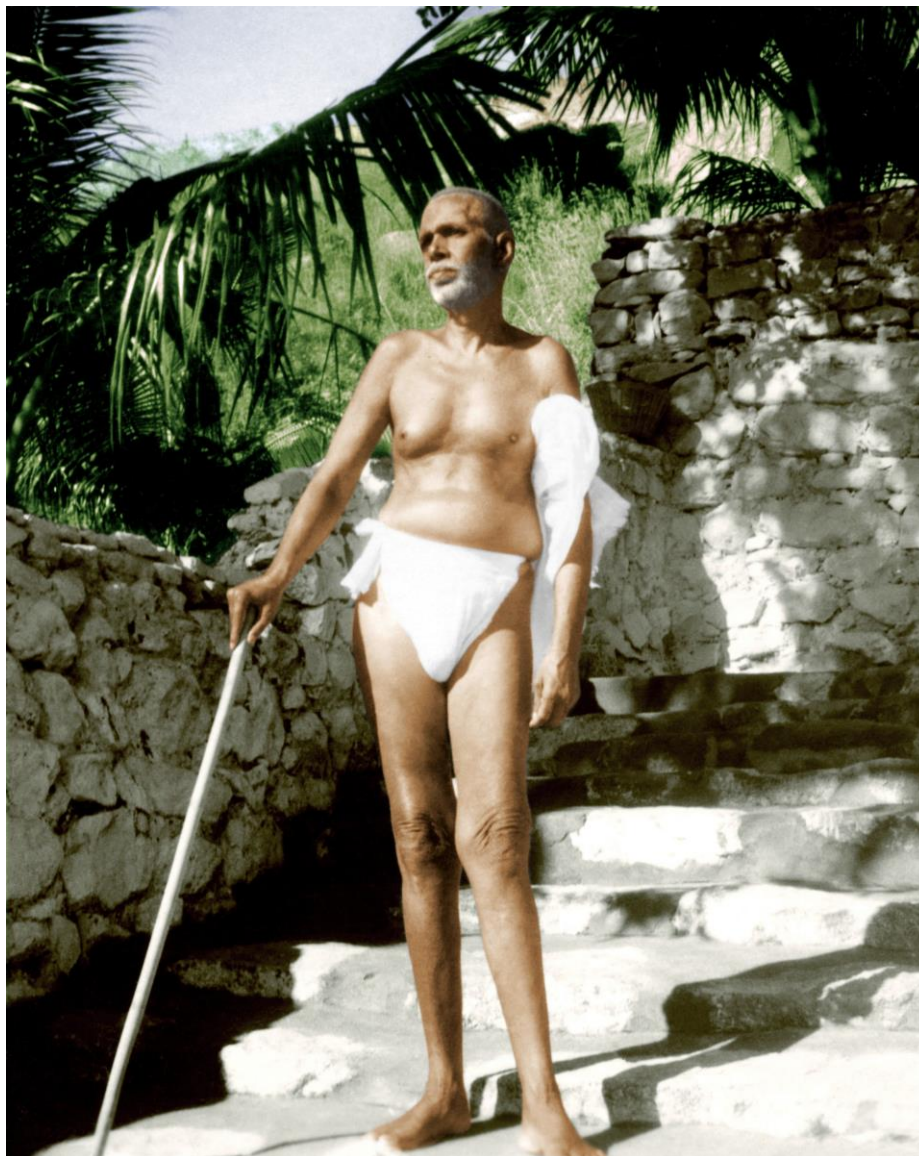
expressed that she wanted to visit Pujya Papa's *Samadhi* and pay her homage. Since doctors had strictly prohibited her from walking, Swami Satchidananda had suggested that she be carried on a chair. By the time Mataji came to the hall, it started drizzling. She was then helped with some difficulty to sit on the chair. Unexpectedly, she turned to me and said with a smile that I should be in the front - the exact position that I used to occupy while carrying the idol of Mother Yogambal, at Sri Ramanasramam! We all joyously carried her on our shoulders out of the hall. I was in ecstasy since I clearly saw Mataji's divine hands behind this extraordinarily compassionate act to fulfill a simple need of mine! On the way, when people held out an umbrella over Mataji, she said, "Hold it over Ganesha. He is getting drenched!" When I heard my name being mentioned by Mataji I strained and turned back to look at her with eyes full of gratitude and joy. She smiled at me and raised her hand by way of blessing me; and, said, "*Are you happy, now ?*" The acts of saints are supremely compassionate! Never before and never after, did Mataji ever sit on a chair and ask others to carry it! For me, there was no doubt that she was doing that only to appease my longing, to carry the Holy Mother on my shoulders. What a blessing to me that I could happily and joyously carry my sacred Mother Yogambal – that too in flesh and blood - on my shoulders! I should definitely have accrued great merit in hundreds of past lives to have this one single act of Grace to descend on me! No one knew why Pujya Mataji acted as she did on that sacred day. Nor did I dare to even vaguely express to any one that she was doing it for my sake! The relationship between a Saint and a devotee is inscrutable - anything can happen, at any time. But one thing is sure - the benefit is always only for the devotee!

There is another interesting anecdote about Mataji that I want to share with seekers. It is important, as it brings out the value and beauty of reading reminiscences of and incidents connected with Sages and Saints. Every occurrence in a Saint's life is a sign post for the seeker to either rectify his own flaws or to build up his virtues. Each one of them is filled with significance. Those who find these reminiscences as not applicable to them, would at least have read something good and interesting. Such reading is not a wastage of time, as it is spiritually energizing. These readings fill the heart with contentment and take one into a state where time seems to stand still. Contentment, Love, Compassion – all are pure spiritual traits that put an end to the anarchy of 'time' and 'mind'. When one's 'mind' is active in divisive thinking, disappointment, disagreement, hate, anger, sorrow, jealousy, bitterness and so on, rule supreme. Reading about Saints and their acts of compassion, bring in a sense of full contentment, a sense of not having wasted time.

During my long stay at Anandashram, Swami Madhurananda, a friendly, cordial and affectionate resident of the ashram who took good care of me, would ask me to tell him stories and incidents about Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. I obliged him for a few days. At that time, another resident of the ashram, was Sashikala of Secunderabad. A young lady,

she was close to Mataji. She was allowed by Mataji to serve her food and also attend on some of Mataji's personal needs. Mataji had guided her from her childhood. Madhurananda used to tell Sashikala whatever I had narrated to him about Sri Bhagavan. Sashikala, in her turn, was narrating all those anecdotes to Mataji while serving her food. On the fourth day, Mataji told Sashikala that instead of her getting those stories from Madhurananda, she should fix up a time with me and hear the stories directly from me and then daily narrate them to her.

One day, due to some reason, Sashikala could not listen to my narration and the session was dropped. When she went to feed Mataji, she refused to eat lunch without a Ramana-story! From next day onwards, our story sessions continued in the mornings – without interruption.

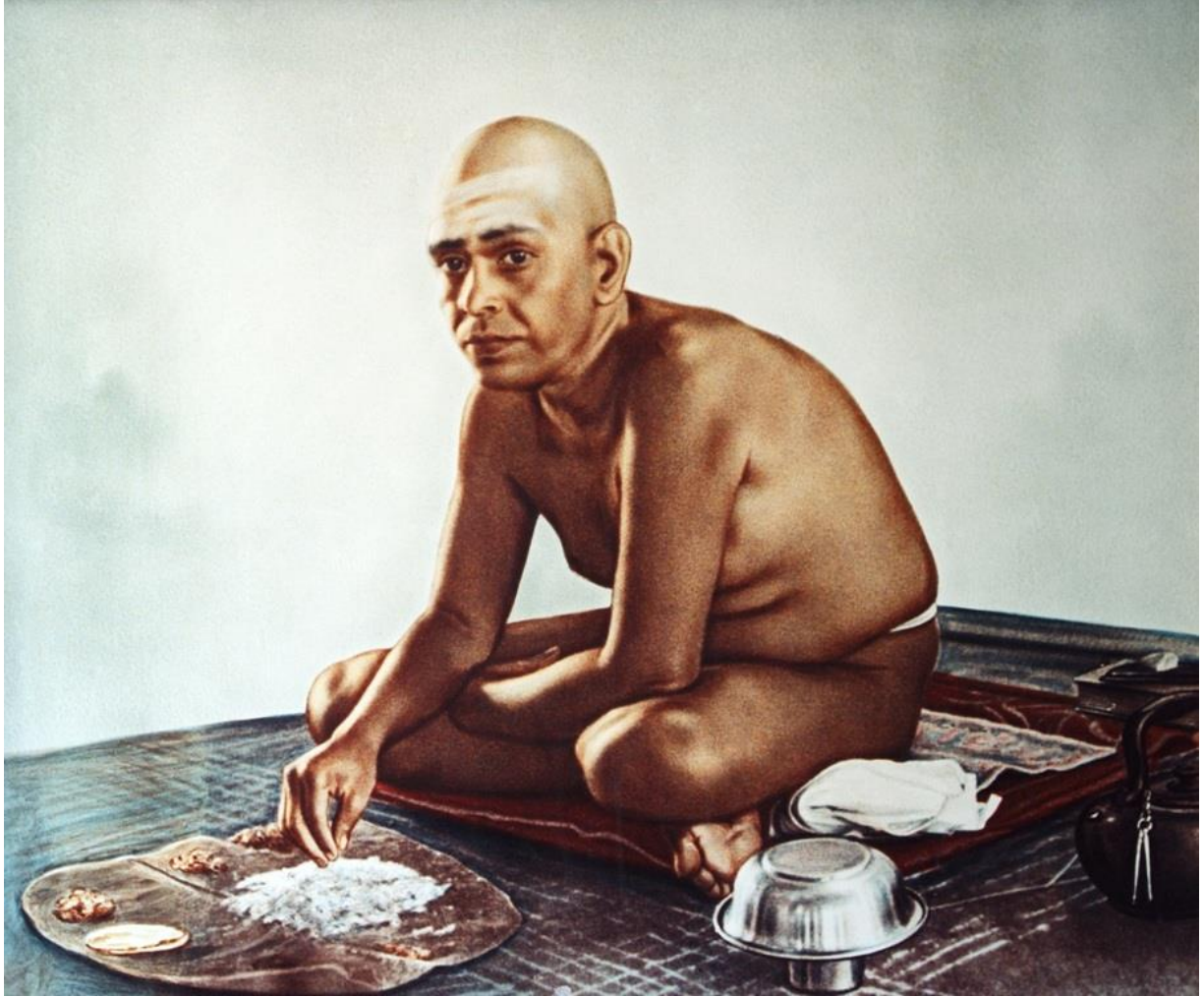


Sri Bhagavan standing at the entrance to Skandasramam

As for me, I would eagerly wait for hearing about the beautiful reaction of Mataji to the previous day's Ramana-story. I was told that Mataji always called Sri Bhagavan her 'grandfather', while Pujya Papa ever remained as her 'father'. Yes, Mataji's devotion to Sri Bhagavan was truly very deep. After these story sessions, Mataji started seeing Sri Bhagavan, quite often in her room. On some days when she was suffering from acute illness, she openly said that her 'grandfather' was very kind to her and was all the time with her, consoling her and even healing her! Swami Satchidananda told me that one day when Mataji was in a serious condition, he rushed to her room. He said that she shouted at him, saying, "Satchidanandam! Where were you? Look, my 'grandfather' has come, and he is standing with his stick and *kamandalu* outside the room. Rush, go! Invite him into the room. Offer him a comfortable seat! Take full care of him. Attend on him. Don't just stand there! Go, go!" When I went to her room, early in the morning, next day, as usual, Mataji gave me a benign smile and said, "You see! I told you that Pujya Bhagavanji is my grandfather! Yesterday, when my health became critical he came, he sat near me and he healed me!" I was thrilled! I did the only thing I could do—I got up and prostrated to her! I felt the powerful presence of Sri Bhagavan in her own physical frame, which, of course, was very fragile and was lying flat on the bed!

In the course of my story sessions, I narrated to Sashikala, the pronounced statement of Sri Bhagavan about food restrictions for true *sadhaks*, which, I am sure, will remain a permanent guidance to all aspiring seekers. Sri Bhagavan usually ate like all others - in the dining hall. An attendant once asked as to whether the rich food and varieties that were continuously being served at the Ashram, were conducive to *sadhana*. Sri Bhagavan first countered, "Why complain about anybody or about anything, especially the food that is given to you? One is always free to limit the quantity of the in-take. Also, if the preparation has more spice or salt, one can add hot water to it, dilute it and eat it without any complaint. Never complain about food!" After a pause, he consolingly added, "For a true seeker doing *sadhana*, a little rice and *rasam* (pepper water—*melagutanni*) are more than sufficient. Even a serious *sadhaka*, occasionally needs something palatable. If he continues to eat only bland food, he may get aversion to food. The tongue needs a little taste and the body system needs a little nutrition for sustenance. *Rasam* which is very watery, also contains the essence of the pulses in addition to some spices and salt. Rice gives strength. That is sufficient for a *sadhaka*. In addition to this, whatever he eats will bring about only illness and ailments to the *sadhaka*."

Sri Bhagavan would take the little rice on his leaf plate add *rasam*, make it into a thin paste and dilute it further by adding more and more hot water. Having done this, he would scoop this mixture with his right palm and eat it! Never on his leaf plate was even a grain left over. The leaf-plate he had eaten from, always looked fresh and unused!



“would take the little rice on his leaf plate add rasam.....”

After I narrated this to Sashikala, at about 2.30 that afternoon, there was a knock on my door. It was the affectionate girl -- NEERU -- with a big cup of *rasam* for me. She explained, “Mataji wanted this to be given to you. Please drink it.” I asked her what the matter was. She replied, “Oh! When Sashikala told Mataji about Sri Bhagavan recommending *rasam*, Mataji refused to eat the lunch that was already prepared. Instead, she asked us to prepare *rasam* and further told us that she would henceforth take only *rasam* and rice, as advised by her ‘grandfather’ ! She also wanted us to prepare a lot of *rasam* and to distributed it to every resident of the ashram.” I was thrilled - what immediate compliance and what great humility! No need to repeat here that when I went to Mataji the next morning, her first query to me was, “Did you drink the *rasam*, yesterday?”

This *rasam* episode is a practical, useful and vital guidance for all true seekers across the world. Seekers in the West may not get ‘rice and *rasam*’, but they can minimize their intake of rich food by having a few slices of bread and a soup ! This is a clear instruction from Sri Bhagavan and fully approved and followed meticulously by Pujya Mataji. Mature seekers should turn their full attention to the practice of Self-Enquiry or whatever be their mode of *sadhana*, and consciously refrain from paying too much attention

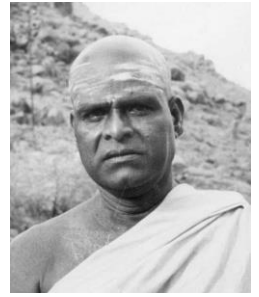
to richness and variety in food. Of course, one may occasionally indulge – at unavoidable parties; and, when guests come home or when on a holiday !

Mataji made me stay with her for two full months. When my father sent a letter requesting her to send me back, she asked me to return. The next day, when I went to her, she asked me, “I feel you want to say something to me! Child! Please go ahead and tell me!” Though I was longing to do so I was reluctant, considering her ill health. Understanding my predicament, she gestured me to come closer, touched my head and told me to get my doubt cleared. Moved to tears, I opened my heart out, “Mataji! More than twenty five years ago, you were gracious enough to guide me on *sadhana* and life. You have protected me as you had assured. There arose no need for me to come to you for either additional personal guidance or any sort of clarification. Everything went off very smoothly. You literally proved that though you were hundreds of miles away, you were with me whenever a need arose. By your Grace, I could do things with a clear understanding that it is you -- my Pujya Mataji -- who is guiding my actions.

“Sri Ramanasramam, which was in debt when I went there for good, is now prosperous. With regular inflow of donations, many guest rooms and guest houses for *sadhakas* to stay in were built. Many important manuscripts from the archives have been brought out as books. The Ashram journal, *The Mountain Path* , was started and through its pages, the name and teachings of Sri Bhagavan are spreading across the world. Old devotees were requested to write down their reminiscences of Sri Bhagavan and most of them have already been brought out as books -- all of them are very popular with devotees.

“Mataji! You especially commanded me to bring back all the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan, who had gone away from Sri Ramanasramam, make them as residents, look after them well and attend to their needs. I am happy to report that nearly forty to fifty Old Devotees have thus been taken care of. Not only were their daily needs met, but during their last days they were given the required medical care. And, once they chose to drop their bodies, I helped carry their bodies to the burial ground and had them buried or cremated, according to their wish. Now, only two more Old Devotees are left. When they also attain the lotus feet of *Satguru* Ramana, my work at the Ashram will be over. After that, I want to totally dedicate myself to inner *sadhana*, as taught by Sri Bhagavan. I want – as advised by you -- to become a ‘nobody’. Mataji! Let me dissolve, disappear as an unknown entity, seriously seeking the Truth. I want to be relieved of all responsibilities and single-mindedly pursue my *sadhana*. Please bless me that I become absolutely free - spiritually, mentally and physically!”

Mataji asked me to come still closer, took my head on her lap, and said, “Who are the two devotees, who are still alive and how old are they?” I replied, “One is Kunju Swami and the other is Ramaswamy Pillai. The former is 94 years old and the latter 96 years old! Both are remarkably agile and healthy. I am very fond of them. I do not want them to leave me. They are so precious!” [*Kunju Swami passed away in 1992 and Ramaswamy Pillai, in 1995*]



Kunju Swami

Pujya Mataji touched my head again and said in a very firm tone, “My child! I will grant you that state of total freedom. It is my responsibility! But, there are a few things yet to be completed by you, through you. After that, you will be free. Until then, be patient and attend to the work entrusted to you. Face all problems with fortitude. Bear all forms of insults, acts of ingratitude and deprivation - all these you will have to face. They will only strengthen you and prepare you to pursue the arduous *sadhana* that you have chosen. Never lose heart, my child ! Remember! I am with you, all the time! My blessings are fully on you! You are ever blessed by Pujya Sri Bhagavanji !”



I got up with intense emotion and repeatedly prostrated to Mataji. My gratitude brimmed over and my eyes were filled with tears, which prevented me from seeing that most beautiful divine form. I went into ecstasy over the spiritual assurance given me by Mataji. She is the Holy Mother, indeed!

From the time I came back from Anandashram and until I left the *Ramaswamy Pillai* Ramanasramam management, so much of external disturbance caused to me, did hurt me deeply. However, I was also fortunate to be aware that in that very process of uncertainties, a thin filament of dispassion, one-pointedness and inner stability was getting solidified inside me. The potent words of Pujya Mataji, “They will only strengthen you and prepare you well to pursue the arduous *sadhana* that you have chosen,” were happily realised as prophetic!

The tragedy of it all was that many of those who were very close to me all those years, turned against me. Yet, again, as assured by Mataji, she stood by my side protecting me -- though imperceptibly -- in the form of a few remarkably dedicated friends; and more especially, through the *Siddha Purusha* Yogi Ramsuratkumar -- her devout disciple -- who relentlessly extended support and protection to me, during this unavoidable period of ‘*the dark night of the soul*’.



This devout account on ***Pujya Mataji Krishna Bai***, is dedicated to the Universal Divine Mother Principle, whose very 'Presence' pours forth Her Grace and Blessings, in abundance, on every one of us -- true spiritual aspirants !



MOTHER RAMA DEVI



Life

Some of us are surely going to feel it strange that today I am going to share with you, almost the opposite of what I asserted in our last session. That is, in the 1960s, Mataji Krishna Bai commanded me to stay at Sri Ramanasramam, bring back the Old Devotees and take care of them. Today, I am going to share about yet another great Saint – **Mother Rama Devi** – commanding me to give up my stay at Sri Ramanasramam, to go away and to take up a job in the world !

True spirituality is filled with apparent contradictions ! Yet, the end result in essence will prove that they will have to be raised in the life of a spiritual aspirant only to fulfill – in all its wholeness – his spiritual aspiration. In my life, such an apparent contradiction took place; and, it proved that it was for my spiritual benefit only !

* * * * *

Rama Devi was born in 1911 at Mangalore, to a devout family of *Gowd Saraswat* Brahmins. She showed indications of a deeply spiritual nature right from her childhood. While sitting for hours in meditation at the shrine of the goddess in her home, she would recite verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*, and would also have spiritual trances and divine visions.

As a child, she looked upon her parents, teachers and elders as embodiments of the divine. She was married at the age of fourteen. Her intense quest for the Absolute began immediately after her marriage. During the day, she would plunge into meditation when she got a respite from household duties. Her nights, on the other hand, were devoted

exclusively to communion with the divine. But, even in the intense madness of divine ecstasy, she did perform her household duties, meticulously.

She had many mystic experiences and exalted visions of prophets and incarnations of different religions during her twelve years of rigorous *sadhana*. Acutely aware of divine intervention in the problems she faced in everyday life, she exemplified the ideal of utter renunciation, purity of divine aspiration and one-pointed *tapas*.

It was at the end of the twelfth year of her *sadhana* that Mother Rama Devi attained *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the supreme state of absorption in the Absolute - in the privacy of her home and amidst the tests and trials of marital life. Emerging from the deep absorption of *samadhi*, Mother Rama Devi beheld with wide open eyes, the enchanting and radiant form of her chosen deity, Lord Rama, bearing in his hand his matchless bow. After reminding her of the mission she had to fulfill on earth, the Lord changed into a mass of Light and mysteriously entered into Mother's body.

While Lord Rama appeared to Mother Rama Devi at the end of her *sadhana*, Lord Krishna was a constant companion of Mother right from the start. Before she got the experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi* for the first time, it is said that she had visions of Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Chaitanya Mahabhrabu, the Hindu Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva - and various other forms of the Divine. She also had a vision of God manifested as the Divine Mother of the Universe, which subsequently formed the basis of her teachings.

Of the vision of Sri Krishna, she said, “Mother preferred service to her husband and the worship of *dharma* even more than the ecstasy of God-vision and the peace of *samadhi*. The vision of Lalita Devi, the Divine Mother, by which Rama Devi realized her identity with the Divine Mother of the Universe, transformed her into the highest expression of Divine Motherhood.

These three visions of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and the Divine Mother Lalita Devi, each represented a distinct phase of Mother's spiritual personality and the message she delivered to the world. Sri Rama signifies the ideal of loyalty to *dharma* to which Mother Rama Devi strictly adhered to throughout her life. Sri Krishna symbolizes the supreme experience of universal love and sympathy, which was the outstanding characteristic of Mother's personality. The Divine Mother Lalita Devi signifies the expression of Cosmic Motherhood in her. It was this overpowering motherly love that attracted thousands of seekers to her presence and guidance.

Sri Rama



Sri Krishna



Divine Mother Lalita Devi



After realization of the Absolute, Mother Rama Devi had various mystical experiences of supreme love - without the least effort of will or direction of thought.

Even before spiritual attainment, Mother had a vision which resolved once for all the conflict between the unmanifest Supreme and the manifest divine, her husband. The vision of the immanent Godhead had brushed aside the human aspect of her husband's personality so completely from her consciousness that she could identify her husband with the Lord Rama of her heart's devotion.

Referring to her spiritual personality, the elderly philosopher, K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, wrote: "In Mother Rama Devi, we see the self-expression of the great spiritual truth revealed in the first verse of the *Isavasya Upanisad*: 'Know that God is immanent in all the beings that move on earth.' Thus, she teaches how to combine and unify self-surrender with Self-knowledge and self-reverence with self-control."

Though well established in the constant consciousness of non-dual Brahman, the highest ecstasy of God-love found expression in Mother. A mere utterance of the holy Name of God was enough to throw Mother into *samadhi*. Those who were blessed to see the exalted ecstasy of Mother felt inwardly uplifted. At times, during her discourses and *kirtans*, she suddenly would plunge into a higher transcendent consciousness, like the famous saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal and receive the worship of her *bhaktas*. She would, meanwhile, bless them through compassionate glances and voice profound spiritual truths which in turn, lifted her devotees to divine ecstasy. But on returning to normal consciousness she was once again her normal self, the compassionate Mother, sweetness incarnate, a picture of simplicity, divine humility, tender motherly love and infinite mercy.

For her, householders had a duty and opportunity to change their home into a hermitage of peace dedicated to the service of mankind and pursuit of perfection. *Grihasthashrama* according to Mother, should represent the distilled essence of asceticism and dynamic spirit of non-attached actions. She advised householders to transmute their earthly connections into a divine relationship with the soul, through the discipline of meditation and yoga under the able guidance of a realized Master. Her vision was to have seekers realize the highest goal - not by renouncing the worldly life, but rather by living it, by transforming worldly ties of family life into a sacred communion of two souls, in which the husband and wife looked upon each other as an embodiment of the Divine and an object of love, adoration and service.

Like her predecessor, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Mother has established the incomparable supremacy of the Divine Wisdom over scholastic attainments. Though

educated only up to the fifth class of a primary school, though a stranger to the world of scriptures, her discourses covered all facts of spirituality and gave intimate knowledge of hidden truths. Her supreme wisdom came to her directly – without the help of scriptural knowledge.

Mother Rama Devi attained *Mahasamadhi* on 1st November, 1978.



Mother Rama Devi

THE TEACHING

“Life in the body is so unsteady as the drops of water on a lotus leaf. But this period of earthly sojourn is precious for, here is the door to life eternal. Know that the only object of your having assumed the body is the realization of the Self.”

“Be a lover of God and you will not lack anything.”

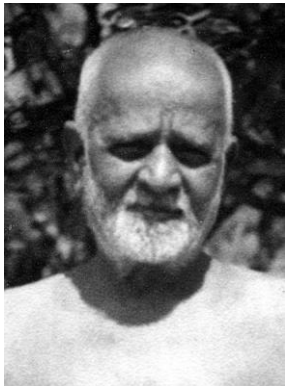
“Be free of enslaving desires. A man without desires is the richest man in the Universe, his wealth being the inexhaustible wealth of contentment.”

“To reach the consummation of life, namely the vision of God, four things are absolutely necessary: pure aspiration, right association, dedicated effort and devotion to the ideal.”

MOTHER RAMA DEVI AND ME

In the 1960s, there was not much activity in Sri Ramanasaram. There were hardly any visitors. Added to this, as there were a number of court cases going on, the atmosphere of the Ashram was one of pensive passivity. It looked almost deserted. The lady cooks, who were used to cooking enormous quantities of food in giant vessels during the lifetime of Sri Bhagavan, used to jokingly remark, “When we were children, we used to play the ‘father-mother game’. Our parents too encouraged us by buying toy vessels that were tiny replicas of all types of large vessels used in cooking for a big family. The vessels now used in the Ashram kitchen remind us of those toy vessels!”

One day, after a couple of months, the apparently sleeping Ashram suddenly woke up, as it were, to jubilation and activity. The reason was that Mother Rama Devi was coming from Mangalore with her retinue, exclusively to be at the Ashram and pay homage to Sri Bhagavan at his Shrine of Grace. N. Balarama Reddiar and Mrs. F. Taleyarkhan were actively involved in making arrangements for the Mother’s visit. On the appointed day, she arrived and was accommodated at the Sathanur Project Guest House, while her retinue was put in the Morvi Compound. The Mother and her retinue of devotees were regularly visiting the Ashram. But, I was not very much interested.



Munagala Venkataramiah

That day, while I was working at the Ashram office, Munagala Venkataramiah, the author and compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, came to me and said, “You have read about *Thakur Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*, right? One of the many things wondrous about that spiritual colossus was his *Bhava Samadhi* (going beyond body consciousness in ecstasy while remaining in a particular posture). All of us have only read or heard about it. But, none of us have ever seen one absorbed in that ecstatic state. Mother Rama Devi also gets into genuine *Bhava Samadhi*, effortlessly. I believe there is going to be *bhajan* by her devotees today. I am told that the Mother often goes into *Bhava Samadhi* during the course or at the end of the *bhajan*. Come, sit with me. I will explain to you.” I obeyed him. The *bhajan* was arranged in the open space in front of the Ashram office and there was quite a good crowd.

According to *Arunachala Mahatmya* - a scripture about the greatness of Arunachala - when Mother Parvathi was performing intense, one-pointed penance at Arunachala to be re-absorbed with Lord Shiva, a demon named Mahishasura violently disturbed her. The Mother warned him not to hinder her *tapas*. But, the demon persisted. Then, the Mother assumed a



‘.....the Mother assumed a fierce Form, fought with the demon and destroyed him.....’

fierce form, fought with the demon and destroyed him. This great victory of the Divine Mother has been vividly described in the beautiful and popular Sanskrit hymn -- *Mahishasura Mardhani Stotra* – it is a long hymn of praises, set in rhythmic tunes.

The disciples of Mother Rama Devi started singing this hymn in chorus and it was really scintillating to hear. When the verses describing the details of the battle between the Divine Mother and the demon were being sung, Mother Rama Devi who was until then in deep meditation, got up with her eyes still closed and started dancing in perfect rhythm, her hands expressing the meaning of the verses with *mudras* – traditional vocabulary of Indian classical dance that is expressed with hands. As the singing reached a crescendo, Mother Rama Devi went into *Bhava Samadhi* ! It was a divine sight, even for a novice like me ! The Mother stood for fifteen minutes in a posture in which it would be impossible to maintain

the body's balance. Especially, considering the generous heft of the Mother's body. The peculiar posture of triumphing over the demon, with one leg up on the air, the arms swinging and the body slanted fully to one side - even a circus acrobat couldn't have remained in that strange posture for that long. The disciples now started singing a pacifying song in low soothing tones, and the Mother slowly came back to her normal state. All prostrated to her. Munagala urged me also to follow suit. I did it willingly and happily, for I was deeply affected by the divine fervour of Mother Rama Devi's *Bhava Samadhi*. Munagala explained to me the nuances of that special *samadhi* state, which enhanced my understanding and inner joy of conscious participation. Without doubt, it was one of the greatest spiritual experiences in my life.

The next day, Balarama Reddiar, an Old Devotee of Sri Bhagavan and an Ashram resident, took me to his room and taking me unawares, pleaded that I should go back to the world, take up a job, earn well, get married and lead the life of a *grihastha* – a family man. I was shocked! Despite all my reverence for him, I flatly refused. He became very angry and told me that this was also the earnest wish of Nagu, my mother and that I had to obey her. In the evening, my mother called me and confirmed what Reddiar had told me that morning. I was totally nonplussed! Why this sudden plot to drive me away from my haven, the Ashram, into the hell of worldly life? I made up my mind not to give in and never move out of the Ashram.

Within a few days, the news of Mother Rama Devi's presence at the Ashram spread all over the town and beyond. Large crowds rushed to the Guest House where she was staying to have *darshan* of her. Restrictions were imposed on the timings of her *darshan*. I didn't take notice of any of these activities as I was deeply hurt and disappointed, feeling that I had been unjustly let down by everyone. My mother's support to this plot intrigued me. How could she join hands in drowning me in the mire of worldly entanglements? Oh, my dear mother, you too!

A day or so later, Dr. Gopalakrishnan, the able secretary of Mother Rama Devi, approached me with the message that the Mother wanted to see me at 2.30 in the afternoon. He was kind enough to add, "Ganesan, you know, it is very rare that the Mother gives private interviews of her own accord. Hundreds of people long to have it, but are unable to. You are very fortunate that she herself has invited you. So, don't miss this golden opportunity. It is a great boon bestowed on you." Despite my disturbed condition, thanks to my good fortune, I replied that I would definitely go and meet the Mother.

When I went to meet her, the Mother was seated alone in a big hall on a comfortable chair. She was all graciousness in welcoming me. I prostrated and kneeled in front of her.

She told me in very good English, “Child! I am happy you readily agreed to come. You are well educated. You have also chosen the right thing to serve Sri Bhagavan’s institution. My blessings are on you.” I felt very happy over those words of confirmation.

I was emboldened to say, “Mother, I have come for good to the Ashram and am very serious in taking to a life of surrender and *sadhana*. I want to dedicate myself to the teaching of Sri Bhagavan all my life and attain *Atma Satshatkar*, Self Realisation. Please bless me, Mother.” She put her holy hand on my head and said, “I bless you, child! You will be crowned with success in your spiritual efforts. Bhagavan Ramana will guide you, protect you and absorb you as his own. Be assured of that.” With great elation, I again prostrated to her.

Then, she started talking to me in intimate terms, “Ganesa! You are my own child. I am very happy you are responding in a positive manner. Such ready response is a spiritual trait. Please listen to me further. Your father brought your mother here and your mother prayed to me to advise you to take up a job and start involving yourself in the regular worldly life. I plead with you that you implicitly obey your mother’s wish. Such compliance on your part will bring you all that is good for you and your spiritual aspiration.”

This was like a bolt from the blue! I did not expect such an instruction, that too from the Mother who had just blessed me and my spiritual aspiration. Yet, the soothing, luminous presence of the Mother was influencing me in a positive way. Managing to assume a balanced state of mind, I replied, “Mother! You are the Divine Mother, who knows everything - past, present and future. You will definitely know that my most sincere desire is to serve my Master and adhere to his teaching, by staying at his Ashram. I pray to you, my dear Mother, please bless me that I achieve this sincere spiritual aspiration of mine!”

“Child, I fully comprehend your genuine aspiration. That is why I am advising you to make your mother happy, by agreeing to her request.”

“How is it logically possible, Mother? You just now blessed me that I will achieve my spiritual goal. Yet, if I am advised to go away from the spiritual quest and get drowned in the quicksand of the world, how am I going to succeed in my spiritual efforts? Isn’t it completely contradictory? How can you advocate both to me, simultaneously? On the one hand you say I will be crowned with success in my spiritual quest and on the other suggest the diametrically opposite course of going into the world and getting involved in the cobweb of worldly affairs.”

Mother touched my head again and smiled at me graciously. With a countenance, filled with peace and bliss she replied in a pleasant but firm tone, “Child, I fully understand

your predicament. It seems logical to you. But, you overlooked the most important thing I told you – ‘First, fulfill the wish of your mother’. Yes, I advised you to leave the Ashram and take up a job elsewhere. I did this keeping your spiritual fulfillment in my heart. I bless you again that you are sure to attain *Atma Satshatkar*. I too am very keen on it. That is why I am requesting you to first obey your mother.”

I couldn’t understand the full import of Mother’s explanation. Fortunately, no resistance rose up within me. I appealed to her to bless me with greater clarity. The Mother was pleased at my readiness to continue to listen to her. “Child, according to nature’s laws, water drenches, fire burns and air cools. These laws are never interchangeable. That vehicles should be driven only on the left side of the road in India, but on the right side in America, are man-made laws. Likewise, there are scientific, medical and architectural laws. In the same way, there are spiritual laws, too. Though everyone is governed by such spiritual laws - no one is outside their purview - the ignorant can never grasp them. But, Sages know them. The difference between the Sages and the ignorant is that the Sages are conscious of these laws while the ignorant are affected by them unconsciously. For your clarity, I shall give you an elementary law: ‘Your mother is the cause of your birth’ - this is easily understood by everyone. But, according to spiritual law, ‘*You are the cause for the birth of your mother*’. Can you grasp its significance? No, it is difficult, right? Look, you know that Adi Sankara and Bhagavan Ramana revered their mothers and did extraordinary things for them. Bhagavan Ramana even actively gave Liberation to his mother. Ordinarily, it will be taken that they did so out of their filial love. But, only Sages realize its full import, its spiritual content. Child, one’s mother’s full concurrence, consent and satisfaction are critical to one’s final spiritual attainment - this is the spiritual secret. Both Sankara and Ramana had already attained the highest possible spiritual state. Yet, they did their best for their mothers’ final emancipation - this is a teaching from them that aspiring seekers must emulate. No one is exempt from this spiritual law. Bhagavan Ramana has clearly narrated the process of his giving Liberation to his mother by putting his left hand on her head and his right on her Heart and making her pass through many lives until there was no residue left. But, how many understand what he described? Sages abide by the spiritual law - they never transgress it. It is in this light child, that I ask you to abide by your mother’s wish.”

It was thrilling to hear the Mother explain the secret about the spiritual law. Yet, I needed further elaboration, greater clarification in the matter. Why should one’s mother alone be extolled? What about one’s father who is also responsible for one’s birth? Mother Rama Devi must have read my thoughts. She gave a pointed smile that almost bordered on laughter and continued, “You doubt why one’s mother alone is given total importance and why the father is left out, don’t you? I will explain it to you. It is common knowledge that the birth of a child is due to the physical union between the father and the mother. But, this is

merely on the physical plane. Just like the foetus growing in the mother's womb. But, something remarkable takes place in the seventh month - the *Atma*, call it Spirit or Soul, enters the foetus. Only then, does what we call a 'child' come into being. Bringing in the *Atma* is done exclusively by the Mother Principle. The Mother Principle is a unique spiritual energy which the intellect can never grasp aright. You have to simply accept the declarations of Sages and Saints in this respect. This is the spiritual uniqueness of the mother. Further proof of the physical uniqueness of the mother is that only a mother can bear two *Atmas* simultaneously – hers and the child's. This is the glory of the *Matru Tattwa* ! Adi Sankara and Bhagavan Ramana were only revering this Mother Principle in their mothers. No father has this unique spiritual feature, though the Father Principle too has special spiritual qualities. So, my child, obey your mother and fully satisfy her wishes. This is my commandment to you!"

I could clearly see that Mother Rama Devi was not using any psychic powers to cow me down. She was logically -- with a touch of real spiritual essence -- pointing out something, which I understood clearly only years later - whatever is to happen, Saints participate in its early and sure fruition. By now, though I was not opposed to her suggestion, I was still genuinely reluctant to leave the Ashram and go away. So, I appealed to the Mother, "Mother! It is great of you to condescend to come down to my level and explain things to make me agree to your suggestion. My spirit too, is willing to implicitly obey your commandment. But, my conviction to take up a spiritual life is so deeply rooted that I find it impossible to say 'yes'. Mother! If you make my attachment to Ashram-life drop off, I will immediately agree." The Mother, with a pleased look, looked pointedly at me. Our eyes met - hers shone very powerfully. She said, "From this moment onwards, your mind will not dwell on perpetuating your stay at the Ashram. You will also willingly take up a job elsewhere and enter a new life. This is my blessing. Don't worry! I will be with you, protecting you wherever you are!"

A miracle took place - like a garment falling from one's body, the clinging thought that I couldn't go away from the Ashram, dropped from me, instantaneously! I prostrated to her and exclaimed, "Mother, you have removed the thought that I will not go away from the Ashram. That phantom's scorpion like grip over me is gone. I am happy and free now."

Mother Rama Devi gave me an embrace and blessed me with raised hands, "I am proud of you, my child. You have come successfully through the difficult test that I put you to. You are a *dheera*, a brave man. Now, go home. And happily, willingly, report to your mother that you will leave the Ashram and take up a job outside. Receive her blessings in full! Go, child, go!"

My mother was pleased and blessed me with tears rolling down her cheeks. I went to Chittoor and got employed as a sub-editor in the same English daily for which I was working in Bombay. Strangely, never even once did the faintest thought of going back to the Ashram occur to me. On the other hand, I was planning to get a better job with a higher salary in any one of the reputed English dailies being published from other cities - I applied to all of them.

Three months passed smoothly. Then, one night I woke up to find my pillow completely wet, thoroughly drenched by what I realized were my tears - I had cried for a long time in my sleep. Within a moment of this realization, the old phantom caught me tightly, almost to the point of suffocation. From where did this come and where had it gone these three months? I didn't want to succumb to its tantrums. I went out for a walk, even though it was an odd hour- one o'clock in the morning. The hold of the phantom did not loosen up. I clearly saw that I was not clinging to the thought of going back to live in the Ashram. Despite this, it was tightening its grip over me, like a ghost. The next morning, I wrote to Mother Rama Devi about all that had happened and seeking her protection so that I could continue undisturbed in my job. She wrote back that it was a trick of my mind and that I should fight it out and win over it. I tried, sincerely, but I could not. For two weeks the tussle went on.

Then, my body started to get affected. I started having loose motions. I went to the doctor and took medicines to stop the diarrhea. Nothing worked. The ailment not only continued unabated, but also terribly weakened my whole system. I was trying my best to obey Mother Rama Devi's advice of suppressing the thought. One day, I couldn't come out of the bathroom, so frequent was the purging. After a few hours, I struggled hard and managed to come out. Something in me, impelled me to write a direct appeal to my *Satguru* Sri Ramana. So, I wrote a letter addressed to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, c/o Sri Ramanasramam, Sri Ramanasramam P.O., Tiruvannamalai. I narrated my condition - the mental fight being put up by me as guided by Mother Rama Devi; and, my utter physical instability. I prayed for his grace for success in my fight with my phantom mind.



My Mother : Nagalakshmi Ammal

Within two days, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a letter from my mother – Nagalakshmi Ammal -- advising me to resign the job, come back to the Ashram and never to go back anywhere else. I was delighted, not only because I was going back to live in the Ashram but also because the final words of Mother Rama Devi on that day of taking leave of her were repeating themselves in my ears, “Your spiritual aspiration will get fulfilled, undoubtedly, if you obey your mother by leaving the Ashram and taking up the job. Don't

ask me again, ‘How?’ You will yourself realise and rejoice when it takes place!” How true Mother Rama Devi’s words of wisdom proved to be!

Before leaving Chittoor, I wrote to Mother Rama Devi, enclosing a copy of the letter that I received from my mother and seeking the Mother’s continued blessings. No sooner I reached the Ashram, I wrote to her about resuming my Ashram duties and again sought her blessings.

A few days later, I got a short letter from Mother Rama Devi, “My blessings are always with you, child !”

I shed tears of joy !

The gap of those months away from the Ashram - I realized - had actually rejuvenated me to rededicate myself in the arduous task of my making efforts to bring back the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan to the Ashram and attending on them – the *sadhana* specifically prescribed for me by Pujya Mataji Krishna Bai !

My mother Nagalakshmi Ammal’s involvement in this whole affair of causing me to leave the Ashram, remained a great puzzle, as I considered my mother my ‘*Guru*’. I got it cleared by her later – only after many years – when she was on her death bed. She clarified, “Balarama Reddiar and your father came home and forcefully told me that I should say so to Mother Rama Devi, for your own good. I wanted you only to be in the Ashram and serve Sri Bhagavan all your life.”

Sri Bhagavan’s Grace ever rules supreme, indeed !



‘The ever peaceful Sri Ramanasramam’



Mother Godavari Mata

MOTHER GODAVARI MATA



Life

Upasani Baba was a direct disciple of Shirdi Sai Baba. He was a great Vedic scholar and an inordinate intellectual. His mind was therefore turned outwards when he surrendered to Shirdi Sai Baba. He was immensely blessed by Sai Baba. However, after some time, Sai Baba instructed him to go and live at Sakori – a few miles away from Shirdi. He was also given the permission by Sai Baba to teach yearning spiritual aspirants there. Upasani Baba implicitly obeyed his guru's command.

In due course, Upasani Baba acquired *siddhis* (miraculous powers) and started performing miracles, which made people worship him as 'God'! Noticing that Upasani Baba was wasting the spiritual energy passed on to him by Sai Baba in performing miracles, a few compassionate devotees of Sai Baba went to Shirdi and reported it to him. Baba reacted apparently angrily, saying, "I wanted him to help spiritual aspirants by teaching them. Instead, is he doing this dog's work?"

At the very same instant in Sakori, Upasani Baba began behaving like a dog - barking instead of talking, roaming on the roads on all fours, eating from garbage, etc. Upasani Baba's close devotees were deeply pained by this deviant behavior as he was a very great scholar who always had adhered to *vaidika dharma* (traditional austerities). So, they went to Sai Baba and pleaded that he release Upasani Baba from the curse inflicted. Sai Baba, in all his compassion, responded by saying, "Did I curse him? I reprimanded only his performance of *siddhis*. Upasani is a great scholar and will continue his spiritual mission!" Immediately at Sakori, Upasani Baba became normal!

Realising his folly, Upasani Baba wanted to punish himself. He told his disciples that he had performed miracles solely to be looked up to as an important person. To repent, he

had them raise a steel cage in a prominent public place in Sakori in which he lived for some time on all fours !

During those 'strange days', a young, ten-year-old girl, served him by feeding him by hand and keeping his bent down body clean. This girl, whom Upasani Baba profusely blessed, became the future 'GODAVARI MATA'.



Upasani Baba blessing Mother Godavari Mata

Godavari Mata was born on 24th December, 1914, in Shegaon, a remote village in Maharashtra. Her parents, were pious and God-fearing. Godavari's mother Ramabai had an extraordinary vision wherein a goddess blessed her daughter and gave a clear indication of her daughter's exalted destiny.

Even as a child, Godavari would be absorbed in worship and adoration of images of gods. Moreover, she had a magical touch - the food that she touched seemed to grow in abundance. She had an amazingly retentive memory which enabled her to recite any poem or passage that was read out to her once. Another notable feature of Mataji's early childhood was her instinctive attraction to all holy men and the reciprocal affection she induced in the hearts of great *Yogis* and *Mahatmas*. They probably recognized in the young child her potential for spiritual realization. One *sadhu* told her parents, "This daughter of yours is no ordinary soul. One day, she will meet a great Yogi through whom she will realize her exalted state and lead pious souls to their goal".

This prophecy was fulfilled, when one day in February 1924, Godavari Mata went to Sakori at the tender age of ten and met her *Guru*, Upasani Baba. The child Godavari was filled with devotion. The Master recognized his completion in the girl who stood before him. Likewise, Godavari intuited that she had met her *Guru*. Upasani Baba told Godavari, "All this belongs to you. You will have to see to its management."

Godavari Mata's unique outpouring of devotion to her *Guru*, and the many incredible hardships she suffered with great fortitude and humility in the service of the master are inspiring examples of what true *sadhana* means. Not that the Mother needed *sadhana* to realise her Self - she was born liberated. Her early life is a moving saga of surrender and devotion which cannot fail to inspire those who seek salvation through the path of *para bhakti* (intense devotion for God). Once, when asked by a devotee when exactly she had obtained that Bliss which is inseparable from Self-realization, Godavari Mata smiled and said, "When? There was not a moment when I did not have it! "

Godavari Mata advocated the practice of adoring God in any form suitable to the temperament of the aspirant. *Japa siddhi* (spiritual attainment through incantation), according to Mother, has been given to us as a special and easy method of attainment in this difficult *Kali Yuga* : Mother laid great stress on the powers of the *mantra shastra*, and she usually initiated deserving *sadhakas* by giving them appropriate *namas* or *mantras*. Those who have been blessed with such initiation by Mata, know the powerful impact of these *mantras*, both on their inner and outer life. The personification of purity, the Mother laid great stress on the gradual cleansing of one's thoughts, motives and actions. She gave a tremendous push to those who sought her Grace for spiritual progress, but at the same

time she enjoined on the *sadhakas* the necessity of persistent effort. Guru's Grace does not operate until it is brought down by the persistent hunger and effort of the disciple. Mataji said, "The highest state man can aspire for is that of God, and to attain it, he has to exert himself. By self-effort man becomes God. Effort can make even God descend on earth or those of the earth attain heaven".

Though nurtured in almost monastic traditions of ascetic living, Mataji has had the courage and the vision to reject all formal manifestations of austerities. She has ushered in an era of gracious living, where *Tyaga* (giving up) is to be practiced to control one's inner life, thoughts and desires. Mother encouraged the performance of *poojas* and maintained that to worship and adorn idols with flowers, jewels and sandal paste was an outlet of man's primitive aesthetical impulse.

In 1917, Upasani Baba had laid the foundation for establishing '*Shri Upasani Kanyakumari Sthan*'. It is situated at Sakori, about 6 kms from Shirdi, in a quiet and calm village. The unique feature of this Ashram is that it is meant to enable young *kanyas* (spinsters) to learn Sanskrit, *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and perform *Yajnas* (sacrificial religious ceremonies with offerings to fire).



'Shri Upasani Kanyakumari Sthan' at Sakori

Godavari Mata, who was the head of the Ashram, herself guided the young spinsters not only in their unique activities but also in their assured spiritual improvement and maturity. She took them wherever she travelled, thus ensuring their growth in an all round way. This unique and special feature was given full recognition and appreciation, throughout India, by both the elite and advanced spiritual Saints. Sri Bhagavan's Old Devotees, like Munagala Venkataramiah, Gajanan Deivarata, Krishna Bhikshu, Viswanatha Swami, TKS, had very great regard for her and spoke to me about her, appreciating Mataji's invaluable services.

Mataji was the first Lady Saint from India to visit the Western countries. Carrying the Torch of Ancient Wisdom and unfurling the banner of Vedic culture, Mataji along with the *kanyas* performed a number of *yagnas* at almost all the important places in India and abroad - at Paris, Antwerp and London. Vedic recitations were arranged. The chanting of the Vedic hymns by the *kanyas* was very enchanting and left the audience spellbound. The Archbishop of Canterbury, who was present on one of those occasions, highly appreciated it.

Godavari Mata attained *Mahasamadhi* on 11th August, 1990. She named no successor. *Samadhis* of Upasani Maharaj and Godavari Mata are located within the *Shri Upasani Kanyakumari Sthan* premises, at Sakori.

GODAVARI MATA AND ME

In the 1960s, I was very eager to tread the spiritual path by serving the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan and the pilgrims visiting Sri Ramanasramam. Noticing my sincere spiritual aspirations, my teacher, *Pundit* T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, helped me by making me recognize the greatness of many Sages and Saints. I have no hesitation in repeatedly stating that I have had two *upagurus* (the great person who guides one to the *Sat-Guru*) : my own mother, Nagalakshmi Ammal, and my teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer.

Mother Godavari Mata, along with her group of *kanyas*, came to Sri Ramanasramam in the late 1960s. My teacher spoke to me about the greatness of Godavari Mata, took me to her and requested her to bless me. Godavari Mata blessed me saying, "Your *Guru* is Bhagavan Ramana. This Ashram is your place of *sadhana*. Serve the devotees. You are already profusely blessed by Guru Ramana."



MA ANANDAMAYEE MA



Life

Ma Anandamayee Ma was born in a small village called Kheora, in Bangladesh, on April 30, 1896. Born into a pious, prestigious but non-affluent household, she was named 'Nirmala Sundari Devi'. It is translated as 'Immaculate Beauty', which seemed appropriate as the infant grew up to be a lovely child. Ma's father, a devout '*Vaishnava*' (devotee of Lord Vishnu), was well known for his beautiful rendering of devotional songs. He would rise at 3 a.m. and sing songs. On one occasion, during a storm, the roof blew off the house and he continued singing in the rain. He was also given to wandering for long periods. Ma's mother was a gentle woman of upright nature and totally dedicated to the welfare of her family. While pregnant with Nirmala, she used to see visions of Sages and deities. She later became a renunciate and accompanied Ma on her travels.

When Nirmala was just 9 or 10 months old, a saintly old man visited them. Nirmala crawled towards this man and smiled. Overcome with emotion, devotion and reverence he put her feet on his head. He then told Nirmala's mother, "What you are seeing is the Mother of the Universe and beyond."

The family grew up in want, and yet fed all the guests who visited them - even if they themselves had to go without food. Nirmala was liked by all and practically grew up in all those peoples' laps.

As a child, delicate religious rituals and the sound of religious chanting would bring about ecstatic feelings in her. She was often distracted and could be seen gazing into space with her eyes unfocused on outer objects. Her education was very limited and her writing skills minimal. Everybody dreads snakes, but Nirmala did not have the slightest

fear. Even as a child, if she encountered a snake, she would not run away but would just jump across the snake and continue her walk.

A happy child, little Nirmala spent her childhood in the serene surroundings of her village. Ready to render whatever service she was capable of to anyone who asked for it, she was a favourite with everyone. The entire village, consisting mainly of Muslim families, extended to her a love and affection that has endured through the years. Even now the Muslim population of her village, Kheora, refer to her as 'our own Ma'.

Ma was barely thirteen when she was married to Ramani Mohan Chakravarty. As a child-bride, Ma was received into the family of her husband's eldest brother and his wife. From a carefree childhood in her parents' home, she was catapulted into a situation demanding considerable hard work in a restrictive atmosphere. She cooked, cleaned, fetched water, took care of the children and served her sister-in-law in every way possible. Hard work is the lot of village women in India, but what set Ma apart from all such girls placed in similar situations was that she remained uniformly cheerful, good-humoured, and more than willing to shoulder other people's burdens. Nothing was a drudgery for her. Also, her serene and equable temper was never disrupted by thoughtlessness or unfair treatment at the hands of the elders.

Actually, Ma's untroubled and happy disposition caused her new family some anxiety - it could only mean a 'simple mind'. They wondered, just like her parents too did, was this little quiet girl too 'simple minded' to be mischievous and naughty like other children? It took many years before Ma's close companions realized that she was ever established in the state her oft repeated statement pointed to: *"Jo ho jaye"* - 'Whatever comes to pass, let it be'.



"Jo ho jaye"

At the age of eighteen, Ma came to stay with her husband at his place of work. Ma used to refer to her husband by the name 'Bholanath'. Much has been written regarding the purity and perfect celibacy of Ma and Bholanathji's married life. Bholanathji, on his part, bore the impact of a beautiful but celibate young wife ever ready to obey his slightest bidding with extraordinary calm.

Soon after, Ma's *leela* or play, of practising *sadhana* began. Ma lived the life of a pilgrim on the spiritual path for nearly six years. Bholanathji realized that he was in the presence of a very special embodiment of Divine Power. She still took care of Bholanathji's needs on his return from work - to the extent of preparing his *hooka* for an after-dinner smoke. After Bholanathji had settled down, she would ask his permission to engage in a little *sadhana*. Permission granted, she would sit on the floor in a corner of their room and orally begin to repeat the *nama japa*, 'Hari, Hari, Hari'.... Only because that was the *nama* or Name she had learnt to sing from her father in her childhood. Bholanathji saw her becoming gradually absorbed in a world of inner joy. After a few days, he saw her assuming some *yogic* postures or *asanas*. The first



".....embodiment of Divine Power....."

of these was the *siddhasana*. Bholanathji knew that she had no previous knowledge of *Yoga* or *yoga asanas* - they were clearly just spontaneously happening to her. He said one day, "Why do you say 'Hari'? We are not *Vaishnavas*". Ma asked, "Shall I then say 'Siva', 'Siva'?" Bholanathji was satisfied. Changing the name she chanted, had no effect on her *sadhana*. Within the very first year of this incident, Bholanathji accepted the much coveted initiation from Ma. Thereafter, their relationship acquired a new dimension - that of *Guru* and disciple, although Ma continued her attitude of complete obedience to Bholanathji. Sometime in 1922, she became *mounam*, silent. This silence marked the fulfilment of her *sadhana*.

In accordance with the orthodox customs of those times, Ma kept herself veiled in public. Only when Bholanathji asked her to speak to someone, she would, not otherwise. Women, of course, were always free to visit her and soon there was a crowd of them around her. The men continued to be at a disadvantage because of the orthodox customs. It was here that Bholanathji played an important role. Soon, he began to be looked upon as 'Baba Bholanath' - a person commanding respect in his own right. With this, the crowds of

both men and women swelled – always assuming the shape of an ever increasing but close-knit family.

In Dhaka, Ma lived amidst an atmosphere of the miraculous. Her healing touch was sought by strangers from far and near. She was seen in ecstatic states of *samadhi* and *mahabhava* during *kirtans*. An eyewitness account of a *mahabhava* on the occasion of a *kirtan* described it in these words: “At one moment Ma was sitting like one of us. The next moment she had changed completely. Her body was swaying rhythmically. Her *sari*’s border fell back from over her head. Her eyes were closed and the entire body swayed to the rhythm of the *kirtan*. With her body still swaying, she stood up or rather was, as if drawn upwards on her foot. It looked as if Ma had left her body, which had become an instrument in the hands of an invisible power. It was obvious to all of us that there was no will motivating her actions. Ma was evidently quite oblivious of her surroundings. She circled round the room as if wafted along by the wind. Occasionally, her body would start falling to the ground, but before it completed the movement it would regain its upright position, just like a wind-blown leaf which flutters toward the ground and then is lifted up and blown forward by a fresh gust of wind.” Ma moved in this manner with the *kirtan* party for a few moments. After such *bhavas*, she would lie in *samadhi* for many hours.

Ma was also sensitive to environmental influences as was demonstrated when she once passed a Muslim tomb. She immediately began to recite portions of the *Quran* and perform the *namaaz*-ritual of Muslim prayers. These and other similar acts showed Ma to be someone always moving through a wide variety of psychic and religious states, each one expressing itself through her. She often objectified her body by describing her actions in phases like “this body did this” or “this body went there”. She believed her uncontrolled actions were expressions of the Divine Will.

Ma set out on her travels in 1927. Baba Bholanath liked to visit places of pilgrimage. They travelled quite extensively. Her devotees in Dhaka gradually got resigned to Ma’s frequent absences. Though her devotees had built a small ashram for her it became clear that Ma felt the need to leave Dhaka. Accompanied by Bholanath, Ma left Dhaka on June 2, 1932. Travelling in a haphazard way she came to Dehra Dun. From there, they found their way to Raipur, a remote village in the interior. They took up their abode in a dilapidated Siva temple, a little away from the village. This was the beginning of a new way of life for the two of them. Bholanathji devoted himself wholeheartedly to his *sadhana*. Ma would wander around alone or sit surrounded by the village women. When she returned to Dehradun, Bholanathji spent almost three years in Uttarkashi pursuing his own *tapasya* or penance. Bholanathji rejoined Ma on coming down from Uttarkashi. He was introduced to the new devotees and was accepted wholeheartedly as ‘*Pitaji*’ meaning father. In May 1938,

Bholanathji died.

The passing away of Bholanathji resulted in a new understanding of Ma and her ways. Ma had been a very devoted wife and she had tirelessly rendered personal service to him whenever he had been ill. During his last illness she was constantly by his bedside. He dropped his body with her hand on his head and breathing the word '*Ananda*'. It was felt that he was giving expression to his own state of *Ananda* and Peace. Most of the devotees thought that Ma would be distraught, but they were amazed to see no signs of grief. She remained as serene as always. She noted their reaction and said gently, "Do you start to cry if a person goes to another room in the house? This death is inevitably connected with this life. In the sphere of Immortality, where is the question of death and loss? Nobody is lost to me".

Ma sometimes ascribed her actions to a personal though unnamed God: "I have no sense of pleasure or pain, and I stay as I have always been. Sometimes He draws me outside, and sometimes He takes me inside and I am completely withdrawn. I am nobody, all of my actions are done by Him and not by me."

She explained that there were four stages in her spiritual evolution. In the first, the mind was dried of desire and passion so it could catch the fire of spiritual knowledge easily. Next, the body became still and the mind was drawn inward, as religious emotion flowed in the heart like a stream. Thirdly, her personal identity was absorbed by an individual deity, but some distinction between form and formlessness still remained. Lastly, there was a melting away of all duality. Here the mind was completely free from any movement of thought. There was also full consciousness even in what is normally characterised as the dream state.

While speaking of spiritual evolution sometimes, she maintained that her spiritual identity remained unchanged since early childhood. She claimed that all the outer changes of her life were for the benefit of her disciples. When Paramahansa Yogananda met Ma and asked her about her life, she answered, "Father, there is little to tell." She spread her graceful hands in a deprecatory gesture. "My consciousness has never associated itself with this temporary body. Before I came on this earth, Father, 'I' was the same. As a little girl, 'I' was the same. I grew into womanhood, but still 'I' was the same. When the family in which I had been born made arrangements to have this body married, 'I' was the same. And, Father, in front of you now, 'I' am the same. Ever afterward, though the dance of creation changes around me in the Hall of Eternity, 'I' shall be the same." Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the 'Self-Realisation Fellowship' of United States, devoted a whole chapter to Ma in his famous book, '*An Autobiography of a Yogi*'.

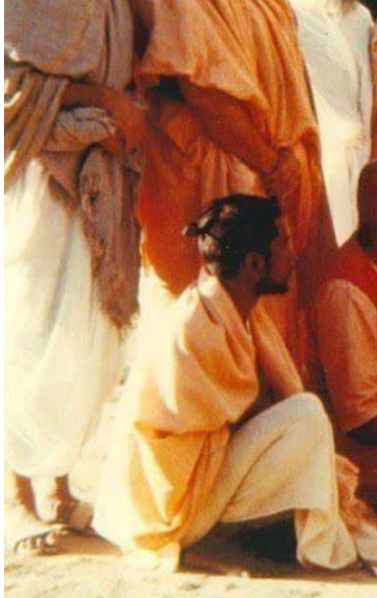
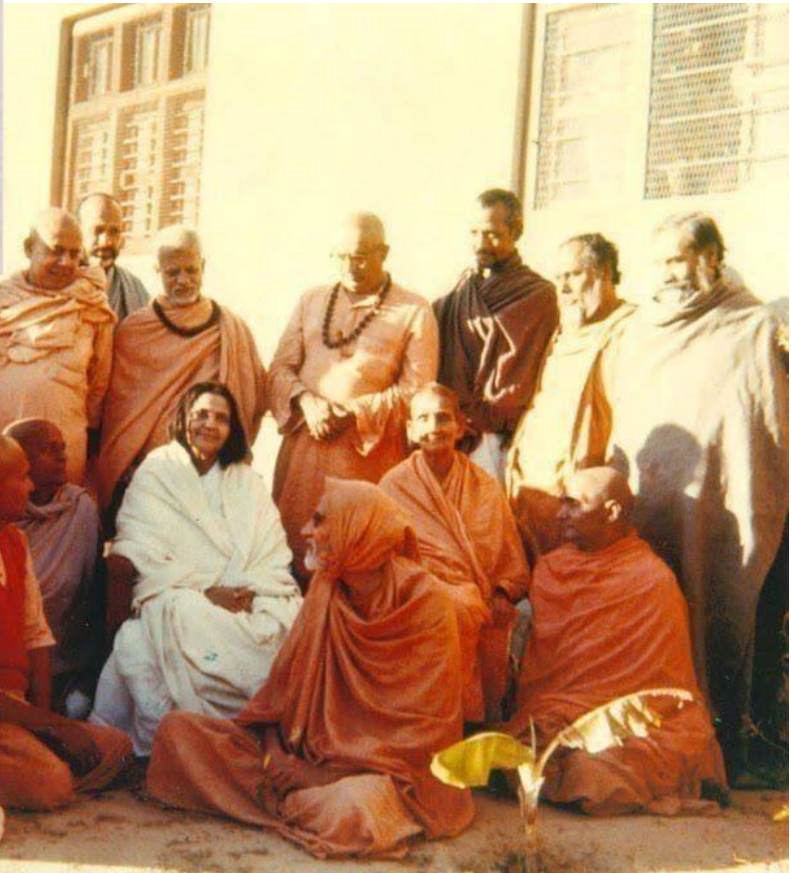
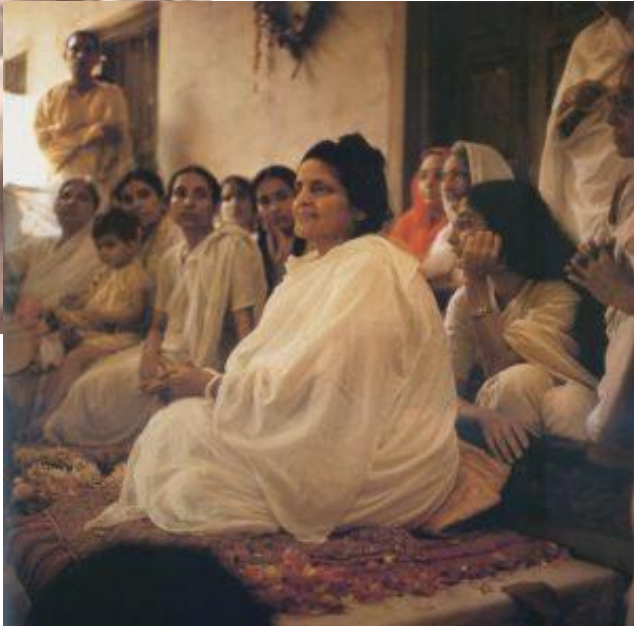
She lived like an ascetic and ate very little – something she did right from her childhood. Apart from the months of abstention from food, which happened periodically, for many years, she used to eat only on alternate days. When scolded, Ma would say, “It is not necessary to eat at all to preserve the body. I eat only because a semblance of normal behaviour must be kept up. Otherwise, all of you will feel anxious about me.” The intake of food was not related to any of her illnesses. Actually, she was in perfect health when she was not eating anything. Illnesses came and went following a rhythm of their own.

In her time, she met with nearly all the political dignitaries who rose to power after Independence, including Gandhiji, Nehru and Indira. They did not talk about state affairs with her. She only spoke about God and the religious aspirations of man. In the late seventies and in 1981, for all practical purposes she had withdrawn herself from public audiences.

During her last days, Ma was serene, but uncharacteristically seemed to be removing herself beyond the prayers of people around her. *Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Sringeri Sarada Peetham*, wanted to invite Ma to Sringeri on the occasion of the annual “*Durga Puja*” and urged that she should quickly get rid of her illness. She replied in her usual gentle tone, “This body has no illness, *Pitaji*. It is being recalled toward the Unmanifest. Whatever you see happening now is conducive towards that event.” At the moment of bidding him farewell next day, she again reiterated her inability to accede to his wishes, saying, “As the *Atma*, I shall ever abide with you.”

In other ways too, she weaned her devotees from her physical presence. She did not attend any of the functions which were being performed as part of the ashram routine. She had stopped taking food for many months. The women who attended on her could give her only a few drops of water – that too at odd moments. Ma spent her last days at Kishenpur Ashram. She made no farewells apart from saying, “*Sivaya Namah*,” on the night of the 25th - this *mantra* being indicative of the final dissolution of worldly bondages. She became Unmanifest around 8 p.m. on Friday evening, August 27th, 1982.

Kankhal at the foothill of the Himalayas is a holy land. By a consensus of opinion an entire body of *mahatmas* came together to assume charge of Ma’s physical remains. The highest honour was given to her - a procession of thousands escorted the vehicle carrying her body from Dehra Dun to Kankhal – wherein was arranged the last rites of interring her body into *samadhi*. As Ma had said she belonged to everybody and so everybody participated in bidding farewell to the human body which had sustained their beloved Ma for 86 years.



Sri Ma's Special Directives for Spiritual Aspirants

In order to advance towards Self-Realisation, it is absolutely necessary for an aspirant to yearn constantly for his sublime goal. He should practice *sadhana* regularly, whether he feels in a mood for it or not.

To criticize people or to feel hostile towards anyone harms oneself and puts obstacles into one's path to the Supreme. If someone does something bad, you should feel nothing but affection and benevolence towards him or her. Think, 'Lord ! This is also one of Thy manifestations.' The more kindly and friendly you can feel and behave towards everybody, the more will the way to the One – who is goodness itself – open out.

Take care not to be contented at any stage. Some aspirants have visions, others realizations. Or, someone experiences bliss, great happiness and thinks he has himself become God. On the spiritual path, before true Realisation supervenes, one may get caught in supernatural powers (*vibhutis* or *siddhis*). These constitute obstacles.

The positive proof that the aspirant is centred in God is that he ceases to hate any person or object, and that good qualities such as love, forgiveness, patience, forbearance go on increasing in him. When this change takes place in an aspirant, he will come to see that the One *Brahman* pervades each and every form, all sects, creeds. An aspirant should not indulge in useless conversation or gossip, but speak only when it is really necessary, which means that he must be a man of few words.

Try and try again to reach the goal you have set before yourself. So long as Realisation does not come, you must never relax your efforts. Let this be your firm resolve.

In the quest of Self-Knowledge, Love is the crucial factor. Whether it pleases you or not, you will have to make the Eternal your constant companion, just like a remedy that has got to be taken. Without loving God, you will not get anywhere. Remember this all the time.



Jai Ma Anandamayee Ma ki jai!



Sri Bhagavan's sacred Samadhi Shrine (earliest photo)

MA AND ME

In 1952, on her pilgrimage in South India, Ma was invited to Arunachala by Sri Ramanasramam to lay the foundation stone for the construction of a temple over the *Samadhi* shrine of Bhagavan Ramana. Those who were present on that occasion still remember the meticulous and measured way Ma handed over one brick after brick to lay the foundation. When the traditional *purna kumbha* was offered to Ma at the entrance of the Ashram, she graciously remarked, “Why all this? Do you do all this when a daughter comes to her father’s home?”

Falling prostrate at Sri Bhagavan’s yet unbuilt *Samadhi* shrine, Ma AnandaMayee Ma, solemnly stood up and spontaneously uttered the following words, “Here is the ‘Sun’ - we are all like ‘stars’ in the day time!”

India abounds in Sages and Saints. Ma Anandamayee Ma occupied a special place in the spiritual history of India. True spiritual aspirants from the West and East flocked to her for spiritual guidance. She shed light, as she was the Great Light itself!

I could not be at the Ashram and have *darshan* of Ma in 1952 as I was studying in the college, far away from Arunachala. When I came to stay permanently at Sri Ramanasramam, and started to imbibe the import and greatness of true spiritual life, I had the great good fortune of having encouragement, support and guidance of the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan who were there at that time.

In the early 1970s, when I was busy helping the Ashram management in various ways, Mrs. Taleyarkhan, Balarama Reddiar, Hugo Maier and Dorab Framji met me at the Ashram office. They insisted that I go along with them to Chennai to have *darshan* of Ma Anandamayee Ma, who was being given a rousing reception in that city. I could not immediately obey them. While Mrs. Taleyarkhan, Hugo Maier and Dorab Framji left earlier, the great good-hearted devotee Balarama Reddiar, stayed on and took me to Chennai towards the end of Ma's stay in Chennai.



*Mrs. Taleyarkhan offering prayers to Sri Bhagavan seated in the 'New Hall' (1949)
Ganesan aged 13 years is also seen in the foreground*

Thanks to these Old Devotees, I had my first *darshan* of Ma at “Kalki Gardens”, where she was staying and conducting *sat sanghs*. She was giving a talk and I listened with rapt attention: “To lose control over oneself is not desirable. In the search after Truth one must not allow oneself to be overpowered by anything, but should watch carefully, whatever phenomena may supervene, keeping fully conscious, wide awake, in fact retaining complete mastery over oneself. Loss of consciousness and of self-control are never right. While absorbed in meditation, whether one is conscious of the body or not, whether there be a sense of identification with the physical or not – under all circumstances, it is imperative to remain wide awake - unconsciousness must be strictly avoided. Some genuine perceptivity must be retained, whether one contemplates the Self as such, or any particular form. What is the outcome of such meditation? It opens up one’s being to the Light, to that which is Eternal.” The devotees took me near Ma and made me prostrate to her. When I stood looking at her, she showered her grace on me, so profusely that I felt as if I was in the physical presence of our Beloved Bhagavan. I stood still, in ecstasy! However, I was taken away very quickly as there was a huge queue of devotees, waiting behind me.

When I expressed to the Old Devotees that I wanted to meet Ma personally and seek her blessings, Balarama Reddiar held my hand and assured me that he would take me to Ma, who was leaving Chennai the very next day. Impatiently I waited for the fortunate hour.

The next day, Balarama Reddiar took me to the Central Railway station. There were lots of police constables guarding all entrances. Reddiar held my hand and walked in a right, royal manner to the compartment in which Ma was travelling. Her compartment was adorned with flower garlands. So, it was very easy to locate it. There was a thick posse of policemen guarding it. But, none dared stop the majestic Reddiar! And he boarded the compartment with a meek me in tow.

Ma was seated all alone – not even a single other person or assistant was there. Balarama Reddiar prostrated to her and directed me to put my head on her outstretched feet. She blessed me by fondling my head and asked me to rise up. Reddiar introduced me as the grand-nephew of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and added that I sought her blessings - especially for progress in my *sadhana*, as I had left all worldly links and was permanently staying at the Ashram serving the old and new devotees. Ma graciously blessed me and said, “Everything is in God’s hands, and you are His tool to be used by Him as He pleases. Try to grasp the significance ‘all is His,’ and you will immediately feel free from all burdens. What will be the result of your surrender to Him? None will seem alien, all will be your very own, your own Self. Either melt by devotion the sense of separateness, or burn it by Knowledge – for what is it that melts or burns? Only that which by its nature can be melted or burnt - namely the idea that something other than your Self exists. What will happen



‘Crawling Krishna’ -- Kanhaiya idol in Ma’s lap

then? You come to know your own Self. By virtue of Guru’s power, everything will become possible. I bless you, child!”

Ma put her hands again on my head and said, “Sri Maharshi’s Grace is fully on you. Stick to your *sadhana*, studiously. Guidance will flood you! Sri Bhagavan’s teaching of Self-Enquiry is your path. Stay at the Ashram. Don’t go anywhere else. He is your Guru. His teaching is your only guidance. Arunachala is your *kshetra*. All blessings will accrue to you. I bless you, my child !”

She gave me two oranges and gestured to me to eat them. Reddiar too confirmed it. So, I ate both of them in Ma’s presence. I felt her Grace seeping in. I felt profusely blessed !

In 1960, I went to Varanasi from Bombay. No one knew where I had disappeared to from Bombay. Naturally, the office I was working in, my friends in Bombay, and especially my parents back at home in Arunachala, all were worried over my disappearance.

Mrs. Taleyarkhan took my father to Bangalore, where Ma Anandamayee Ma was staying and giving *darshan* to devotees. When my father expressed deep concern as to

where I could have disappeared, Ma gave a beautiful smile and said, "Don't worry! My Ganga Mata is protecting him. You will soon hear from him. He will be alright!" When father went back to Arunachala from Bangalore, a telegram was waiting for him, announcing my having been located at Varanasi!

More than 25 years later, I went to stay for a year in Varanasi (1988-89) - as directed by Yogi Ramsuratkumar. Many spiritual experiences happened to me. One such was the following: I used to visit the Ramakrishna Ashram there and get totally absorbed in myself in their Meditation Hall, which was open to all. One day, when I was coming out of the hall, an elderly swami of the ashram approached me and said, "I have been observing that you often meditate here in front of *Thakur* Sri Ramakrishna. It fills my heart with joy that a young man is absorbed in such deep meditation. Have you ever been to Ma Anandamayee Ma's Ashram on the banks of Ganga Mata? If you have not, please go there and spend some time in meditation in front of the Shrine which was worshipped by Ma herself. Make sure you request the elderly swami there to show you the 'Crawling Krishna' idol. It is sculpted out of black stone and is about a foot in height. Also, ask him to tell you about the unique greatness of the idol." I hastened to go to the Ashram of Ma that very same day. I searched for and found out that particular elderly swami. He was very happy to know that I came from Arunachala. He said he had been on a pilgrimage to Holy Arunachala at the behest of Ma herself. Even before I could ask of him about the 'Crawling Krishna' idol, he brought it out from another room and proceeded to tell me the thrilling incident that he had witnessed:

"Ma brought the Krishna idol during one of her visits here and told us that the child Krishna was very hungry and that we should bring food for him. We brought the *naivedhya* (sacramental food) that is offered to the main deity that is daily worshipped here. The Holy Mother sat down and held the idol on her lap. Embracing it like a mother, Ma offered the idol morsel after morsel of food. And lo! Every morsel was eaten by this idol of 'Child Krishna! Not only I, but a few others who are still alive, were also eye-witnesses of this spiritual spectacle! Ma was all joy and went into ecstasy as soon as she finished feeding Sri Krishna! After that, every time Ma came over to Varanasi and stayed here, she took enormous interest in feeding her '*Kanhaiya*' (Black Krishna). Please touch it, prostrate to it, and receive not just Sri Krishna's blessings, but also the profuse blessings of Ma!"

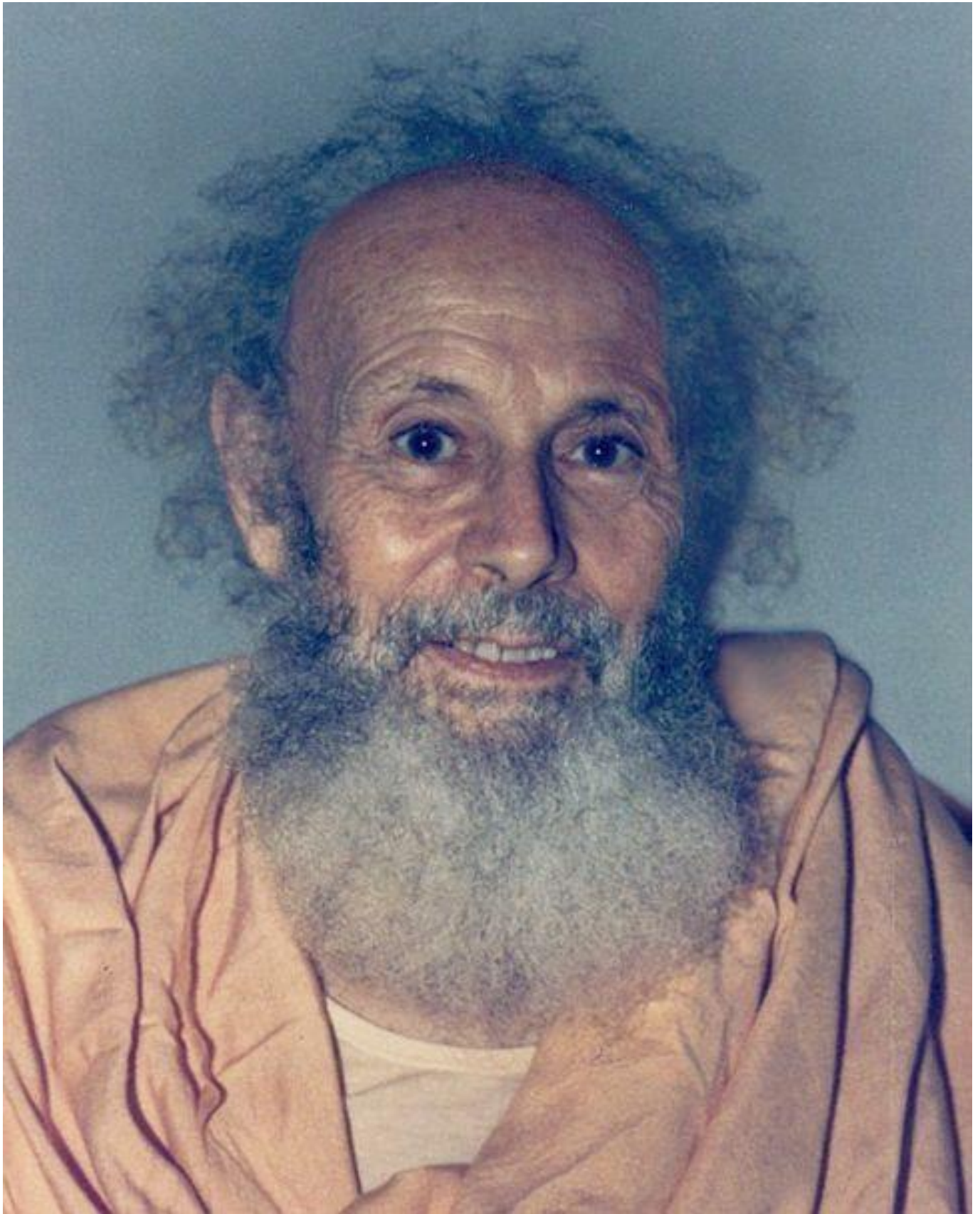
The very touch of the 'Child Krishna' sent me into ecstasy. After that, every time I went to Varanasi, one of the main shrines I would spend time without fail was that of the 'Child Krishna' at Ma Anandamayee Ma's ashram – in addition to the shrines of Lord Viswanatha, Mother Annapoorni, Mother Visalakshi and Mother Varahi, among others. Many of my close friends too, have had the same spiritual experience when they followed suit in

response to my persistent and eager pleading to have the *darshan* of the black, 'Child Krishna' at Ma Anandamayee Ma's Ashram in Varanasi.

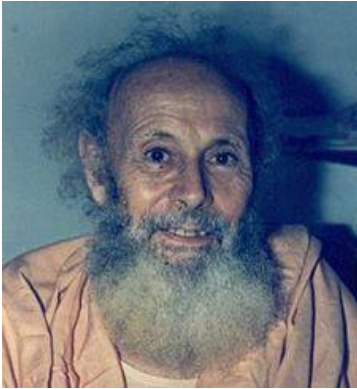
Truly, we are all very fortunate that we are always profusely blessed by the Grace of Sages and Saints !

Sri Anandamayi Ma
श्री श्री आनन्दमयी माँ

My consciousness has
never associated itself
with this temporary body.
Before I came on this earth
'I was the same'.
As a little girl
'I was the same'.
Ever afterward,
though the dance of
creation change around
me, in the hall of eternity
'I shall be the same'. -----Sri Ma



SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA



Life

Henri Le Saux, popularly known as 'Swami Abhishiktananda' was born on August 30, 1910, in Brittany, France. From a very young age, he felt a calling to the priesthood. So, in 1929, he decided to enter the contemplative life as a monk of the Benedictine Order. As he wrote, "What has drawn me from the beginning, and what still leads me on, is the hope of finding there the presence of God more immediately than anywhere else. When it is a matter of seeking God, I hope I shall not be disappointed."

Though leading the life of a monk, he was seeking a more contemplative way of life. Soon, he felt the call of India. Le Saux contacted Father Jules Monchanin who had worked in India since 1939. His reply was most encouraging, "Learn as much English as you can. You should have no objection to a purely vegetarian diet -- essential for the life of a *sannyasi*. You will need complete detachment from the things of the West and a profound love for India." Having completed all the necessary formalities in the summer of 1948, Henri Le Saux set off for India.

The future Swami Abhishiktananda reached the Indian coast through Sri Lanka on the 15th of August. Two days later, he met Monchanin in Kulitalai, Tamil Nadu. It took him several months to become acquainted to the new life. "India reveals Herself to those who are prepared to be still; and, over a long period to listen humbly at close quarters to the beating of Her Heart; only to those who have already entered sufficiently far into themselves, into their own depths, to be able to hear in the Inner chamber of the Heart the 'secret' that India is ceaselessly whispering to them by means of a 'Silence' that transcends words. For, Silence is above all the languages, through which India reveals Herself; imparts her essential message -- the message of Interiority, of that which is 'Within'." At the end of 1948, there was a great change for the good. An encounter with Bhagavan Sri Ramana

Maharshi at Arunachala brought about, "a genuine retreat as well as an introduction to true Hindu monastic life." The meeting with the Maharshi left a tremendous impact on Le Saux - from then on, he focused his spiritual search on an even deeper level by starting to realise the truth of Advaita. "Ramana's Advaita is my birthplace," he wrote. He proudly asserted, "In the Sage of Arunachala, I discerned the unique Sage of the Eternal India". During the following summer in 1949, Le Saux and Monchanin had another (and last) *darshan* of the Maharshi.

It was in those striking and austere surroundings around the Maharshi that he experienced the non-dual Presence from the depths of his consciousness, making Abhishiktananda declare, in the later years : "It was a real Revelation". We can get a glimpse of the nature of this 'Revelation' from his description :

"Anyone who is the recipient of this overwhelming Light is at once petrified and shattered; he can utter no more 'words'; he cannot think any more; he just remains as 'Being' -- outside of 'space' and 'time' -- alone in the very aloneness of the Alone !"

On March 21, 1950, the two monks, started the '*Shantivanam Ashram*' on the banks of River Kaveri, at Kulitalai. At first, the original purpose was to found an Indian Benedictine Ashram - "an ashram, Hindu in form, where Hindus and Christians would hold silent communion in the quest of the Unique." The two monks adopted Indian names - Le Saux became '*Swami Abhishiktananda*', meaning 'bliss of the anointed one'. They adorned the ochre robes of *sannyasis*. Though a monk for twenty-one years, Swami Abhishiktananda was not fully aware at that time of the implication of *sannyasa* being a sacred Hindu tradition which should be received from a *Guru* through an initiation ritual. "Man's primary task is to enter within, in order to encounter himself. Whoever has not encountered himself within himself has never encountered 'God'; and, whoever has not encountered God in himself, has never encountered himself. No one encounters God apart from himself. God is he who is at the Heart of all, at the Source of all. So long as anyone has not entered that Source within, is simply cherishing the external idols which he has created for his own petty imaginations."

At the same time, Arunachala continued to attract him. So, in March-April 1952, two years after the Maharshi had dropped the body, he moved to a cave called '*Vannaatti Guhai*' on the sacred hill for a ten-day retreat in complete silence. This true spiritual experience was followed by further retreats. It was during one such retreat in 1953, that he met Harilal W.L. Poonja, a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi. During his several stays in the caves of Arunachala over a period of three years, Abhishiktananda met a number of people who helped him to immerse himself completely in the Direct Teaching of the Maharshi.



Harilal W.L. Poonjaji

In December 1955, Swami Abhishiktananda visited Swami Gnanananda Giri at Tirukoilur who gave him a spiritual and non-formal initiation. The only spiritual practice that Gnanananda Giri recommended was *dhyana*, meditation: "Return within, to the place where there is nothing, and take care that nothing comes in. Penetrate to the depths of your Self, to the place where thought no longer exists, and take care that no thought arises there! There, where nothing exists, is Fullness! There, where nothing is seen, is the vision of Being! There, where nothing appears any longer, is the sudden appearing of the Self! *Dhyana*, is this!"

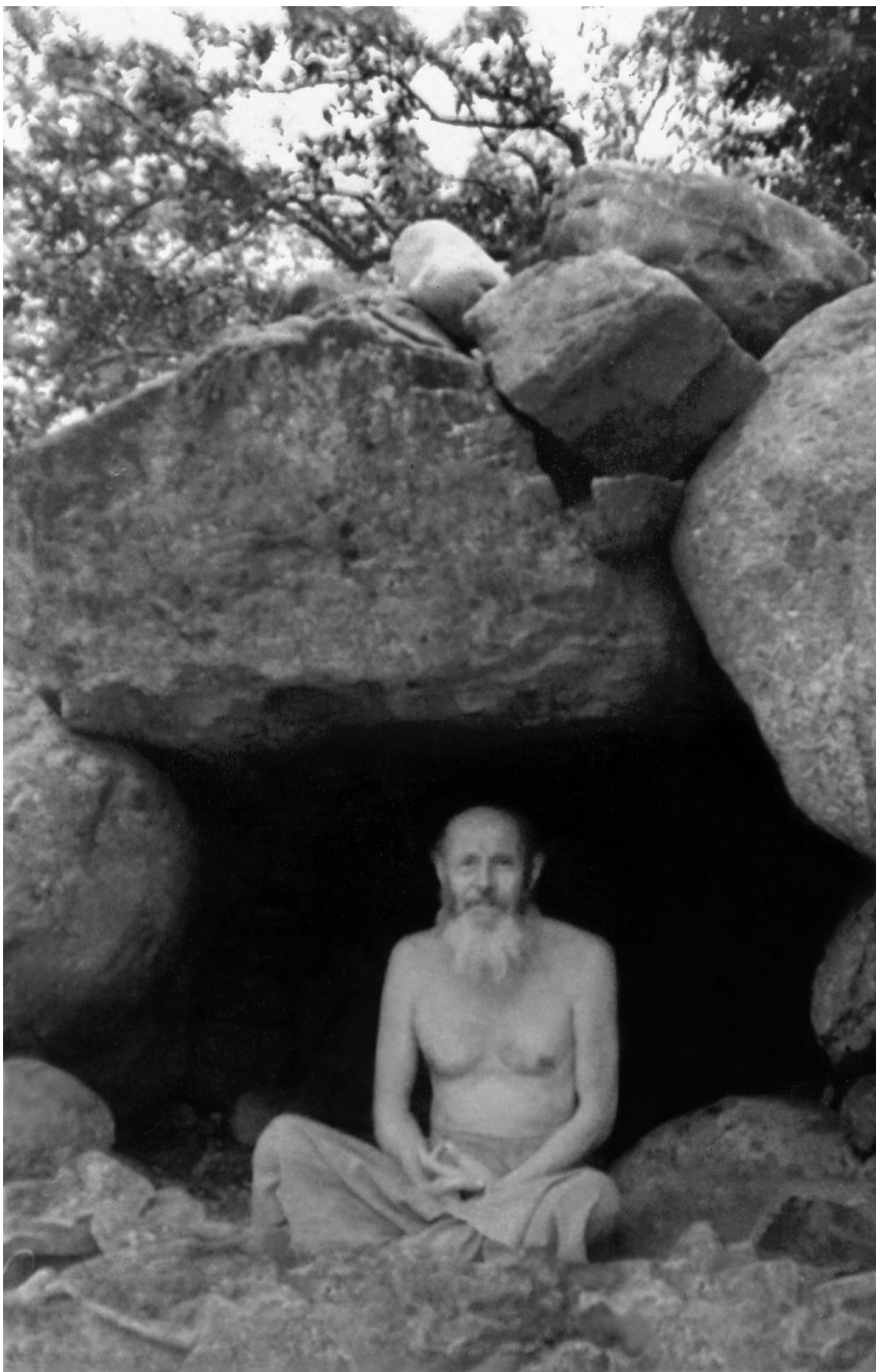
Feeling more and more attracted to the Himalayas, Swami undertook several journeys and pilgrimages. In a letter to his sister, he wrote: "The Himalayas have conquered me! It is beside the sacred River Ganges that 'Shantivanam' ought to have been. I do not know if that would ever happen, but how splendid it would be!" With the passing away of Monchanin in 1957, and with no candidates having joined the ashram, Swami finally decided to leave 'Shantivanam Ashram' and settle as a hermit in the Himalayas. In 1968, he found Father Bede Griffiths, a British Benedictine, and, handed over 'Shantivanam Ashram' to him.



Swami Abhishiktananda at his hermitage in Gyansu, Uttarkashi, Himalayas



On the Summit of Holy Arunachala



“.....Swami Abhishiktananda inside the cave on the Holy Hill - Arunachala.....”

In the autumn of 1971, after a two-year correspondence, Swami Abhishiktananda met a twenty-seven-year old French student, Marc Chaduc, who soon became his disciple. In 1973, at the Ganga Ghat of Shivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, Swami Chidananda Saraswati initiated Marc into *sannyas* and named him 'Swami Ajatananda'. It was when Swami Abhishiktananda and Swami Ajatananda were spending time together in a deserted Shiva temple in Ranagal, that they both had an intense spiritual experience. Sometime after this, Abhishiktananda suddenly suffered a heart attack when going down to Rishikesh one day to fetch provisions. He survived only for five more months. For him though, it was a state beyond life and death and an awakening to the Self. He wrote to Swami Ajatananda, "I AM. The awakening has nothing to do with any situation. The '*Awakening*' - '*Prabodha*' - just IS."

The awakening experience -- *Atma Sakshatkara* -- was overwhelming! Swami Abhishiktananda spent his last months in absolute Peace and Bliss - a state of profound Realisation of the Truth, beyond all religions.

Swami Abhishiktananda's *Mahasamadhi* took place on the 7th of December, 1973.



Sri Arunachaleswara Temple viewed from the Holy Hill

SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA AND ME

I think it was in 1956-57. It was a hot summer. In those days, Sri Ramanasramam hardly had any visiting pilgrims. At about 1 p.m., I was seated in the verandah of the New Hall facing the entrance to the Ashram and very close to the steps guarded, as it were, by two stone elephants – one on each side. With me was my teacher, T. K. Sunderesa Iyer. During most of such sessions with TKS, I would be simply looking at him, in silence and tremendous admiration! Admiration for what? I didn't know nor did I make any effort to know !

Suddenly, I noticed TKS making efforts to get up. He was looking intently at two Western *sannyasins* who were just entering the Ashram. The moment they came nearer, the elder of the two prostrated before my teacher and reverentially introduced the other as his disciple. TKS introduced me to him, but added, "He is Ganesan. He is not my disciple, but my *guru*! He bears the name of my guide-*guru*, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni! " Both of them laughed in hearty spiritual communion!

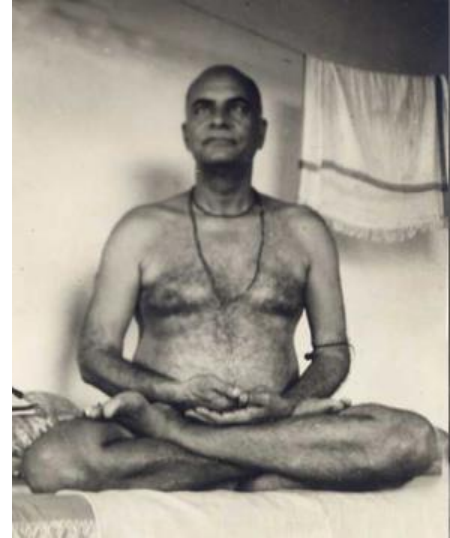
Turning to me, TKS said, "He is Father Dom Henri Le Saux, a French Benedictine monk. Having taken *sannyasa*, he is now popularly known as 'Swami Abhishiktananda'. A devotee of our beloved Bhagavan, he came to Sri Bhagavan in 1949. He once told me that his search for the Truth ended the moment he stood in the presence of Sri Bhagavan. It seems Sri Bhagavan then told him, 'Do not meditate – just BE! Do not think you are – just BE! Do not think about being – you ARE!'



Pundit T.K.Sunderesa Iyer - 'seated in the verandah of the New Hall'

“He lives now in one of the cave-huts up on the Hill in line with Virupaksha Cave. You should visit him. Swami has always been kind to share with me his spiritual experiences. He is a true spiritual pilgrim, immersed in Truth!” The two *sannyasins* took leave of us and went to the Old Hall to meditate.

I became deeply inquisitive in knowing more about this Western hermit living on the holy hill. After a brief period of silence, I requested my teacher to narrate some spiritual experience the Swami had shared with him. He condescended to share with me the most interesting reminiscence of Swami Abhishiktananda. (For the sake of accuracy, I quote that fascinating narration from Swami’s book, instead of paraphrasing what my teacher told me!) It was about how H. W. L. Poonja (Papaji) strengthened Abishiktananda’s rooting in the direct teaching of Sri Bhagavan. I was spellbound listening to it!



Harilal .W. L. Poonja in deep meditation

Swami Abishiktananda: “The first time that I met H. W. L. Poonjaji was in the cave of *Arutpal Tirtham*, up on the Hill, on March 13, 1953. It was about four in the afternoon. I was sitting on my stone seat outside the cave. I asked him, ‘How did you manage to get here? Who could have told you about me? Who directed you to my cave?’ ‘You called me,’ replied Poonjaji, looking me straight in the eye; ‘and here I am. Let me say it again; it was you who called me. The Self attracts the Self. What else do you expect?’

“We spoke about the Maharshi, his teaching and his disciples - all of which he was perfectly familiar with. Near me lay some books, including *The Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. As our conversation passed from the subject of the Maharshi to that of the Scriptures, I picked up one of my books to quote a text from it. ‘And, what is the use of all that?’ asked Poonjaji bluntly. ‘All your books, all the time lost in learning different languages! Which language do you use to converse with the *Atman* (Self)?’

“As I attempted to defend my point of view, he cut in again, ‘Forget about it! In fact, apart from the Self, what else is there? So, your English, Sanskrit and the rest, how do they benefit you? Are they any use for conversing with the Self, for speaking to yourself? None of that leads anywhere useful. The Self has nothing to do either with books, or with languages, or with any scriptures whatever. It IS – that’s all!

“I, also,’ he continued, ‘was mad about reading once; but I never learnt anything from it. Now I read nothing, or so little as makes no difference. Not even the *Gita*, whose words

in the old days were all the time ringing like music in my heart. I don't meditate any more either – the Self has nothing to do with meditation. It is the same with *japa*, repetition of divine names, *mantras*, litanies, *bhajans*, every kind of devout prayer and lyric. At one time, I quite naturally made use of all these – and with great fervour.'

"When I expressed surprise at this, and reminded him of the teaching of Sri Ramana, he was willing to go so far as to say that as the time of the 'crossing over' approached, when worship and prayer become too artificial, and even unnatural, then – with the *Guru's* approval, of course – one might abstain. I therefore reacted pretty vigorously to Poonjaji's remarks.

" 'Who realizes or has realized the Self?' he replied. 'That is all a matter of words. The *Atman* cannot be reached. Apart from the Self, what else is there? Who reaches the Self, except the Self? Non-realisation is simply an excuse that one gives for trying to escape from the Real; and, continuing to lead with a clear conscience, a stunted life of prayers, devotions, and even asceticism, all no doubt very satisfying to the little ego, but in fact utterly useless. Has the Sun really set, merely because I have closed the shutters? The fundamental obstacle to Realisation is precisely the notion that this Realisation is still awaited.

" 'Of course,' he conceded, 'reading is not to be entirely rejected. It is better to read than to daydream or gossip. And, meditation is better than reading. However, it is only in the ultimate Silence that the *Atman* is revealed, if one may so speak. But once again, we have to guard carefully against supposing that this Silence has anything to do with either thinking about it or not thinking about it. For, the *Atman* cannot be reduced to anything capable of being said, thought or taught, or equally to the negation or absence of thought. You are a lover of Silence. You have done so remarkably well. You are quite ready. What are you waiting for?'

"I responded, 'Ready for what? Alas, I feel myself so feeble when before God I recall what I ought to be.' He roared, 'Enough of this nonsense! Stop talking about differences. There are no differences anywhere. There is only the Self. God is the *Atman* – the Self of all that is. I am the *Atman*. You are the *Atman*. Only the Self exists, in Itself and in all.'

"But, how do you know that I am ready?" 'When a woman is ready to give birth, can she be unaware of it? When every woman who has already been a mother knows the signs without a shadow of doubt. It is the same with those who are near to the awakening, or rather, whose 'I' is on the point of disappearing in the Light of the essential and unique 'I'. I saw it in your eyes this morning when we passed each other in the bazaar without you

noticing; that is when you called me.'

"You are speaking as if you had been sent here expressly to give me this news. But if, as you say, I am so near to the awakening, why do you not go ahead and awaken me?" He asserted, 'There is no question of awakening anyone at all. Who indeed is the sleeper? How could one awaken that which does not sleep and has never fallen asleep? Sleeping, dreaming, being awoken – all that is a matter of the body and the senses, which are located in the body, including, of course, thought, desires and will. Are you this body? Are you this thought which you have of being or existing within the limits of this body? When you are in deep sleep, do you still have any thought or awareness that you are? But still, even then you exist, you ARE. You are in truth neither this body which sleeps or alternatively keeps awake, nor this thinking mind, sometimes clear and sometimes confused, which flutters about within you, constantly picking up impressions on every side, nor are you even the awareness that you have, beyond all these thoughts, of being – an awareness which vanishes in deep sleep, in coma and at the dissolution of the body.

" 'It is through YOU that it is seen and heard, through YOU that it is thought and willed. You are what remains when nothing is any more seen or thought, willed or heard. That is the *Atman* - the Self - it is what YOU ARE yourself in reality and beyond all outward appearances which change and pass away. *Tat Tvam Asi* - YOU ARE THAT! What prevents you from realizing this?

" 'Can you remember the time when you were born? Can you discover in your memory some moment which would have been the first moment of your existence? Have you any awareness of beginning to exist? Did you not exist already, well before the time when you can remember that you existed? If your being is tied to the memory that you have of it, then what happened to you in the times of which you have no recollection? What happens to you at the moment when consciousness goes to sleep?'

"After a pause, he asserted, 'Let me tell you again, there is only one thing that you lack. Enter into the *Guha* – the Cave of your Heart – and there realize that YOU ARE!'"

(from *The Secret of Arunachala*, pp. 81—86)

* * * * *

After a few months, I ventured to go in search of Swami Abhishiktananda living in a small hut on the hill. He was in deep meditation. I waited patiently outside with immense interest to learn what a studious *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) should do while treading the

path of spirituality. Soon, he received me with warmth, love and tenderness. I then raised that doubt of mine.

Swami seemed very pleased at my eagerness and said, “Ganesan! Instead of me explaining to you every detail of the nuances embedded in treading the path, I will narrate to you the life of a serious *sadhaka* who impressed me very much. She lived in the next cottage. Please listen with attention.” (For the sake of authenticity and clarity, again, I quote this important story from Swami’s book.)

“Sundarammal belonged to a wealthy Telugu family of Madras. She married young but lost her husband soon after. As a widow she continued to live at home, surrounded by the love of her parents and brothers. She rarely went out, and when she did, it was always with her father.

“One day, he took her to the neighbouring temple to hear a talk given by a *sadhu*, who was a devotee of the Maharshi. He narrated to the audience – with religious fervor – details of how the Sage’s spiritual transformation at the tender age of sixteen took place at Madurai, his disappearance from home, his resort to the Mountain of Arunachala and how serene his presence is, showering peace and bliss on all who visit his ashram at the foot of the Holy Hill. Sundarammal was deeply moved. She begged her father to allow her to accompany some pilgrims to Arunachala. He refused, but promised that he would soon take her there himself.

“But the promise was not fulfilled. Sundarammal passed the time thinking of Sri Ramana and praying to him. She soon lost her appetite and was unable to sleep. Her father always had some especially urgent work which prevented him from taking her to Tiruvannamalai.

“One afternoon, about four o’clock, she seemed to see Sri Ramana coming down the mountain and approaching her. ‘Sundarammal, have no fear!’ he said to her. ‘It is I. Enough of this weeping and not eating or sleeping. Come, I am expecting you.’ Her heart was filled with joy. Once more she appealed to her father, and once more he put off the pilgrimage to another day.

“Some weeks later, she was alone one night in her room, weeping and calling on the Maharshi. Then, quite worn out, she fell asleep. Suddenly she felt a blow on her side and awoke with a startle. It was about three o’clock in the morning. There was the Maharshi standing by the head of her cot. ‘Come,’ was all he said.

“She followed him downstairs, crossed the hall and came out on the verandah. Hardly had she reached it when to her alarm she found herself alone. The Maharshi had disappeared. She sat down uneasily. Soon, a rickshaw appeared, and the rickshaw puller asked, ‘Is this Number 12, and are you Sundarammal? An old *sadhu* told me to come here and take you to the bus stand. Get in.’ Sundarammal thought quite simply, ‘It is Sri Bhagavan, the Maharshi,’ and, got into the rickshaw.

“At the bus stand, she and the rickshaw puller were both surprised not to find the old *sadhu*. However, she asked for the bus going to Tiruvannamalai and got in. Somewhere on the way, her bus passed another one from which someone alighted and then entered the Tiruvannamalai bus. ‘Are you Sundarammal?’ he asked. ‘Yes, I am’ she replied. ‘Good. Sri Bhagavan has sent me to look for you.’

“In the evening, she reached Tiruvannamalai and retired for the night to one of the large halls reserved for pilgrims. She prepared a cake to offer to Sri Bhagavan and fell asleep full of joy. The next morning, she went to the Ashram and fell at the feet of Sri Bhagavan. ‘Here you are at last. Did it take so long to reach me?’ he said to her. Sundarammal felt blessed and was in ecstasy. She was in the immediate presence of her *Satguru* Ramana!

“Some days later, her brothers arrived, unable to understand how this child, who, by herself, had never set outside her home, could have managed to reach Tiruvannamalai. But, Sundarammal was so deeply absorbed in Sri Ramana’s presence that she never even noticed her brothers, either in the Hall or at midday in the dining hall. Only in the evening were they able to approach her. They told her how upset everyone was at home and begged her to return. If she wanted, they would build her a hermitage in their garden. But nothing moved her, and the brothers even spoke of taking her home by force. ‘If you do, I will throw myself into a well,’ she said. Her brothers had to yield, but they soon returned with their father. They found her in a cottage near the Ashram and arranged for her continued stay there. During the fifteen years that remained of the Maharshi’s life, Sundarammal never left Tiruvannamalai even for a day.”

Seated next to a Western hermit up on the hill, listening to this remarkable journey within of a sincere aspirant as to how Sri Bhagavan practically guided Sundarammal, was a thrilling and ecstatic spiritual experience for me.

After a few years, I went up the hill and again met Swami Abhishiktananda. He was very kind and requested me to visit his ashram at Kulitalai situated on the banks of River Kaveri, though he himself was then staying at the Himalayas. He introduced his disciple, Father Bede Griffiths to me. Father Griffiths would visit Arunachala every year for the

Karthigai Deepam. It was my pleasure to receive him and his disciples and host them at the Ashram. On every such occasion, Father Griffiths would request me, with deep affection, to visit ‘Shantivanam Ashram’ and take rest there for a few days. It was very kind of him. However, in those days, I was busily engaged at our Ashram with continuous work. So, I could never go. Consequently, my cherished wish to visit ‘Shantivanam Ashram’ got postponed year after year.

Though it was the time -- later half of 1970 -- when both Swami Abhishiktananda and Father Bede Griffiths had dropped their bodies, another Arunachala resident and Western devotee of Sri Bhagavan - Hamsa de Reede (later, known as Swami Hamsananda) - took me in his car to his ashram in Kerala. The purpose was to decide whether we could help start, a book stall of Sri Bhagavan’s books there. On our way back to Arunachala, Hamsaji asked me whether I would have any objection if he detoured and went to Kulithalai and stayed at the serene Shantivanam Ashram for a day. I was delighted! With joy I said, “Please take me there!”

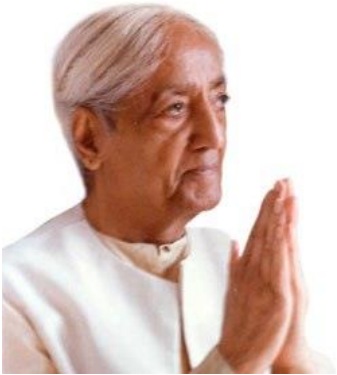
During my stay at that ashram, my heart was filled with gratitude and fulfillment. Is not the ancient saying, “Great men’s words would never go in vain,” absolutely true?! I paid my homage and obeisance to the spiritual presence of Swami Abhishiktananda and Father Bede Griffiths at ‘Shantivanam Ashram’, Kulitalai.



‘Mount Kailash’ in the Himalayas



J. KRISHNAMURTI



Life

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on 11 May 1895 in Madanapalle, a small town in South India. He and his brother, Nitya, were adopted in their youth by Dr. Annie Besant, the then President of Theosophical Society. Dr Besant and others proclaimed that Krishnamurti was to be a 'World Teacher' whose coming the Theosophists had predicted. To prepare the world for this coming, a world-wide organization called the '*Order of the Star in the East*' was formed and the young Krishnamurti was made its head. In 1929, however, Krishnamurti renounced the role that he was expected to play, dissolved the '*Order*' with its huge following, and returned all the money and property that had been donated for this work. From then on, for nearly sixty years until his death on 17 February 1986, he travelled throughout the world talking to large audiences and to individuals about the need for a radical change in mankind.

Krishnamurti is regarded globally as one of the greatest thinkers and religious teachers of our time. He did not expound any philosophy or religion, but rather talked of the things that concern all of us in our everyday lives -- of the problems of living in modern society with its violence and corruption, of the individual's search for security and happiness, and the need for mankind to free itself from inner burdens of fear, anger, hurt, and sorrow. He explained with great precision the subtle workings of the human mind, and pointed to the need for bringing to our daily life a deeply meditative and spiritual quality.

Krishnamurti belonged to no religious organization, sect or country, nor did he subscribe to any school of political or ideological thought. On the contrary, he maintained that these are the very factors that divide human beings and bring about conflict and war. He reminded his listeners again and again that we are all human beings first and not Hindus, Muslims or Christians, that we are like the rest of humanity and are not different

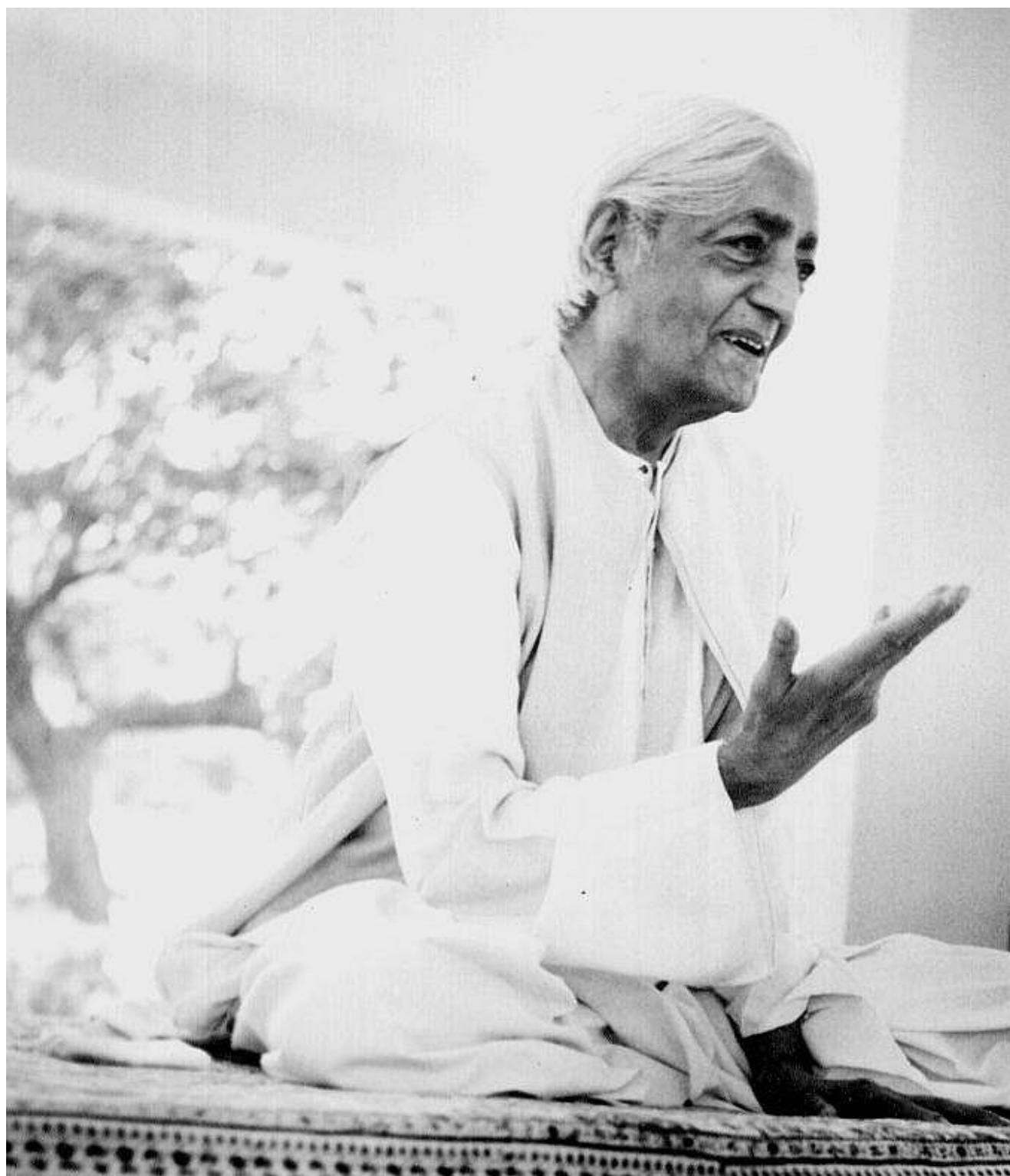
from one another. He asked that we tread lightly on this earth without destroying ourselves or the environment. He communicated to his listeners a deep sense of respect for nature. His teachings transcend man-made belief systems, nationalistic sentiment and sectarianism. At the same time, they give new meaning and direction to mankind's search for Truth. His teaching, besides being relevant to the modern age, is timeless and universal.

Krishnamurti spoke not as a *Guru* but as a friend, and his talks and discussions are based not on tradition-based knowledge but on his own insights into the human mind and his vision of the sacred, so he always communicated a sense of freshness and directness although the essence of his message remained unchanged over the years.

When he addressed large audiences, people felt that Krishnamurti was talking to each of them personally, addressing his or her particular problem. In his private interviews, he was a compassionate teacher, listening attentively to the man or woman who came to him in sorrow, and encouraging them to heal themselves through their own understanding. Religious scholars found that his words threw new light on traditional concepts. Krishnamurti took on the challenge of modern scientists and psychologists and went with them step by step, discussed their theories and sometimes enabled them to discern the limitations of those theories.

Krishnamurti left a large body of literature in the form of public talks, writings, discussions with teachers and students, with scientists and religious figures, conversations with individuals, television and radio interviews, and letters. Many of these have been published as books, and audio and video recordings.





J.Krishnamurti

THE TEACHING

When asked in 1974 by his biographer, Mary Lutyens, to define his teachings Krishnamurti, wrote the following:

"The core of Krishnamurti's teaching is contained in the statement he made in 1929 when he said 'Truth is a pathless land'. Man cannot come to it through any organisation, through any creed, through any dogma, priest or ritual, not through any philosophical knowledge or psychological technique. He has to find it through the mirror of relationship, through the understanding of the contents of his own mind, through observation and not through intellectual analysis or introspective dissection. Man has built in himself images as a fence of security - religious, political, personal. These manifest as symbols, ideas, beliefs. The burden of these images dominates man's thinking, his relationships and his daily life. These images are the causes of our problems for they divide man from man. His perception of life is shaped by the concepts already established in his mind. The content of his consciousness is his entire existence. This content is common to all humanity. The individuality is the name, the form; and, superficial culture he acquires from tradition and environment. The uniqueness of man does not lie in the superficial but in complete freedom from the content of his consciousness, which is common to all mankind. So he is not an individual."

"Freedom is not a reaction; freedom is not a choice. It is man's pretence, that because he has choice he is free. Freedom is pure observation without direction, without fear of punishment and reward."

"Freedom is without motive; freedom is not at the end of the evolution of man, but lies in the first step of his existence. In observation, one begins to discover the lack of freedom. Freedom is found in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence."

"Thought is time. Thought is born of experience, of knowledge, which are inseparable from time. Time is the psychological enemy of man. Our action is based on knowledge and therefore time; so, man is always a slave to the past."

"When man becomes aware of the movement of his own consciousness, he will see the division between the thinker and the thought; the observer and the observed; the experiencer and the experience. He will discover that this division is an illusion. Then only is there pure observation which is insight without any shadow of the past. This timeless insight brings about a deep radical mutation in the mind."

"Total negation is the essence of the positive. When there is negation of all those things which are not love - desire, pleasure - then love IS, with its compassion and intelligence."

THE SAGE AND ME

I was steeped in Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings and had come for good to live in Sri Ramanasramam. The recorded conversations of the Maharshi with seekers had just been published. As I was associated with its production from the manuscript to the printed book, almost every answer of Sri Bhagavan was resounding in my ears. If I was not reading or contemplating the *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, I would be discussing its contents with fellow seekers. Sri Bhagavan's name and form meant so much to me -- that it was like the breath of my life itself!

Then, in the early 60s, a friend spoke to me about a great spiritual Master whose teaching, he said, was similar to that of Sri Bhagavan's. I listened, but nothing went in. I had not read J. Krishnamurti. Whatever little my friend told me about the man and his teachings fell on deaf ears.

When I was next in Madras, the same friend took me in his car one evening to a talk given by Krishnamurti. I must confess I went more to humour my friend than to listen to a spiritual talk. When we reached the gates of "Vasant Vihar", the talk had already begun. After walking a few yards into the garden, I was charmed to hear a sweet voice talking over the microphone. Its very tone made me very happy. I was yet to see the speaker. "Sir, take it for certain. If there is no Truth within you, there is no Truth outside of you!" My whole body shook with ecstasy. If Sri Bhagavan had spoken in English, he would have said the very same words – this was the feeling that reverberated in me! Also, the very first *darshan* of his comely figure, mysteriously humbled me. I listened to the talk. Something churned inside and a tremendous admiration for him arose within me. I was silent for the rest of the evening.

Every year, thereafter, I regularly went to Krishnaji's talks. I listened to him as attentively as possible. I made it a point to read his books. I honestly tried to understand his teaching, without bias or prejudice. I did not discuss Krishnamurti with anyone, since I wanted to learn his teaching myself, directly. My outward behaviour, movements, why, even the way I dressed, all changed by themselves, though imperceptibly. And, it happened in a most beautiful and natural way.

I understood that the crux of his teaching was centred around each individual as the Truth. "You are the Truth. You alone can know it. No one else can make you realise it."¹ This absolute stress on the 'you' helped me to take the plunge within 'me'. Yes, the 'I' in every 'you' and 'me' is the clue to the living Truth. This vital message, though couched in the most unconventional terms, made me pursue it relentlessly.

The message of the Maharshi, “The ‘I’ is the Reality, the only Reality that ever exists,”² became vibrantly evident in Krishnamurti’s central teaching. However, one question again and again reared its head: while Bhagavan Ramana’s words had a soothing effect, why did Krishnamurti’s create such turbulence in my mind?

I chanced to read the following lines from M.P. Pandit: “One teacher does not repeat what another has done already... To compare Ramana Maharshi to some modern teacher is to see him in a wrong perspective. Sri Ramana, like every other world teacher, has come to reveal a new approach to the Eternal Truth. The Truth always stands Eternal, but the approaches vary depending upon the changing conditions through which humanity is passing.”³

I remembered Sri Bhagavan’s proclamation, “There are no *jnanis* (Realised Persons). There is only *jnana* (Realisation).”⁴ Since we view the Masters as bodies through our body-mind complex, we see them as different entities and their utterances too as separate, differing, and in opposition. When we look at them as persons (like Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Lord Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bhagavan Ramana, J. Krishnamurti) we miss the unifying aspect of their singular ‘Wholeness’.

The scriptures say, *Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti* - “Truth is One. Sages call it by different names.” How true! Could it be that the society and environment in which the Sage takes birth moulds the mode of expression of the Sage?

Ramana Maharshi was born into an orthodox, *Brahmin* family. He was schooled like any other lad and had had no good or bad influences, spiritual or otherwise. He did not even know about meditation, *sadhana*, *Brahman*, *atman*, bondage and Liberation - subjects which he was to expound upon later. In fact, Maharshi categorically stated: “This is called philosophy and the learners are struggling to learn all this! Is it not sheer waste of time? Ah! Fortunate is the man who does not involve himself in this maze! I was indeed fortunate that I never took to it. Had I taken to it, I would probably be nowhere - always in confusion.”⁵

His “Death Experience” at the age of sixteen, made a Sage out of an average school boy. That final experience, which he preferred to call “Self-Realisation”, continued without any change, modulation, addition or subtraction. Bhagavan Ramana was fortunate that he had no outer influences except his own introspective, inner quest.

Krishnamurti, perhaps, was less fortunate! Also born into a *Brahmin* family, he was ‘discovered’ on the beach at Adyar by Bishop Leadbeater and it was ‘decided’ by the Theosophical Society and Dr. Annie Besant, to bring up Krishnamurti and groom him into a ‘World Teacher’. The boy’s training included his being taken abroad and given the best of

education. Everything was ‘told’ to him. The one saving grace was that Nitya, his younger brother whom he loved intensely, accompanied him wherever he was taken.

In 1922, Krishnamurti underwent a series of inexplicable experiences of his own at Ojai, which was later termed “the Process”. For three days Krishnamurti’s body was racked with pain. Nitya wrote to Mrs. Besant the details: “He was unconscious a great deal of the time, cried out, could not bear to be touched, complained of pain in his head and neck, fainted, did not eat, shivered and yet complained of heat, was in agony most of the time and strangely quiet for some time, and then on the third day he sat under a young pepper tree and started chanting... The Buddha, Lord Maitreya, and other celestial beings seem to have appeared before Krishnamurti, and he went into a deep trance.”⁶ Krishnamurti too gave his own account of this experience which ended with the words, “I am God-intoxicated.”⁶

He was then twenty-seven years old. However, this vitally important yet mysterious “Process” did not change his outward life. His travels and talks continued as usual. So did the efforts to announce him as the World Teacher. In 1925, his brother Nitya died. It brought about a great change in Krishnaji’s life.

Then, dramatically, at the age of thirty-four, he renounced his position as leader of ‘*The Star of the East*’. The message he gave on that day in August 1929 to thousands of his admirers including Mrs. Besant, is of the greatest importance to the spiritual community. He declared:

“I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever... I am concerning myself with only one essential thing: to set man free.”⁷

From then until his passing in 1986, his talks were aimed at shaking off his listeners’ religious slumber and awakening them to Reality.

Krishnamurti’s language was modern. For example, instead of *Brahman* he used ‘Energy’, ‘Choiceless Awareness’ or ‘Insight’; instead of *sunya*, ‘silence’, ‘space’; instead of *manas*, *ahankara*, ‘the brain’, and so on. In fact, he made this logic explicit when he advised Dr. Adikaram who wanted to give talks on Krishnamurti and his teachings in Sri Lanka: “Don’t use a Sanskrit word. To use it is to bring to mind the ancient tradition and to sanction past comprehensions. A Sanskrit word will attach what you are saying to the remembered texts. Tell it in your own way, in your own language, what you are seeing. Use modern Sinhalese words.”⁸

A beginner in Krishnamurti’s teaching is initially faced with two apparent hurdles. The first is his usage of unconventional terms and the second, his denial of spiritual

techniques, the *Guru*, and God.

Puzzled by these, I voiced my concern to the mystic-saint, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, also a great admirer of J. Krishnamurti. He listened attentively, and with a beatific smile replied, “Krishnaji is for the non-believers. Believers have any number of Masters to follow. But for a genuine non-believer, what is the recourse? Hence, Krishnaji chose totally different terms - terms acceptable to non-believers.” After a pause, Yogiji added, “I assure you, Krishnaji gives us the same essence as any of the great Masters, but couched in different terminology.”

Having received this inspiring clarification from an incomparable *Siddha Purusha*, I plunged myself again into the reading of both Krishnamurti and the Maharshi. It was not surprising that I stumbled across a plethora of striking similarities and it gladdened my heart.

* * * * *

Krishnamurti: “Things happen in their own course. Stop fretting.”⁹

Maharshi: “Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is for one to be resigned.”¹⁰

Krishnamurti: “The mind is cause and effect, it is caught in time, it has a beginning and an end. Mind can never experience that which is without cause, the timeless, that which has no beginning and no end.”¹¹

Maharshi: “How is it possible for the mind to know the Lord who imparts His light to the mind and shines within the mind except by turning the mind inward and fixing it in the Lord?”¹²

Krishnamurti: “Thought cannot, do what it will, free itself from the opposites; thought itself has created the ugly and the beautiful, the good and the bad. So it cannot free itself from its own activities. All that it can do is to be still, not choose. Choice is conflict... The stillness of the mind is freedom from duality.”¹³

Maharshi: “If a man is free from the pairs of opposites and lives in solitude, perfect wisdom shines in him even in the present body.”¹⁴

Krishnamurti: “I was born in India into the Brahmanical fold. That root — it might be thousands of years old — was his conditioning, but so long as the mind was so conditioned, it was not free. It was the past as thought that essentially divided [the] man.”¹⁵

Maharshi: “Break away from all relationship of country, status, caste and its duties and think always of your own natural state.”¹⁶

Krishnamurti: “When the mind is in that state of loneliness, without any escape, then there is freedom from it. Separation exists because of the desire to fulfill; frustration is separation.”¹⁷

Maharshi: “A yogi should not be swayed by desires or yield to gratifying the senses. He should find ecstasy in the Self alone, free from desire and fear.”¹⁸

Krishnamurti: “When I step out of that stream, I am not fragmented, not contradictory. I am Whole. The Whole has no root.”¹⁹

Maharshi: “He enjoys bliss who realizes the Supreme, beatific, formless One, not alloyed with perceptions but is in pure all-covering Awareness.”²⁰

Krishnamurti: “The body does not divide. It never says, ‘I am’. It is thought that separates.”²¹

Maharshi: “This body does not say ‘I’. Nobody says ‘I did not exist during sleep’. Once the ‘I’ arises everything arises. Inquire with a keen mind whence this ‘I’ arises.”²²

Krishnamurti: “This feeling of the ‘me’¹ and ‘mine’ is the very core of the mind, it is the mind itself.”²³

Maharshi: “That which arises in the physical body as ‘I’ is the mind.”²⁴

Krishnamurti: (speaking of the sign of the Cross): “The straight line is the ‘I’ and the horizontal bar, the negation of the ‘I’.”²⁵

Maharshi: “Christ is the ego. The Cross is the body. When the ego is crucified, and it perishes, what survives is the Absolute Being.”²⁶

Krishnamurti: “In the Hebraic tradition it is only *Jehovah* ‘the Nameless One’ who can say ‘I AM’, that is the *Tat Tvam Asi* in Sanskrit.”²⁷

Maharshi: “‘I AM’ is the name of God. Of all the definitions of God, none is indeed so well put as the Biblical statement : I AM THAT I AM’ in *Exodus* (ch. 3). There are other statements, such as *brahmaivaham*, *aham brahmasmi* and *soham*. But none is as correct as the name JEHOVAH — “I AM”. The Absolute Being Is what is — it is the Self. It is God.”²⁸

* * * * *

From 1965 until his last talk in 1986, almost every year without fail, I attended Krishnamurti's four annual talks at "Vasanth Vihar" in Chennai. I was drawn only to his teachings and not to his personality. I had more than one opportunity to have private audience with him, but I did not do so. My conviction was that if Sri Bhagavan was one side of the 'coin' of Truth, J. Krishnamurti was the obverse side of the same 'coin'. While both gave the same Truth, they used different expressions of emphasis.

During my long stay at KFI, Varanasi in 1988-89, I had the great good fortune and opportunity of transcribing more than 70 audio cassettes containing the talks given by Krishnamurti all over the world, never transcribed before ! That enabled me to have direct access to Krishnamurti's core teaching, which were not available in any of his published works of that time. It made me more and more deeply interested to delve into his inimitable teaching.

But, though I never had private meetings with Krishnaji, I feel blessed and privileged to have many one-to-one meetings with some of his very close associates. Their sharing with me of their experiences with Krishnamurti -- the person -- confirmed that a Sage can never be pigeonholed. For the simple reason that a Sage's 'inner reality' can never be grasped by our minds, even though it is always fascinating, always enlightening and very easy to behold within one's Heart !

R. R. UPASANI



R.R.Upasani

Later, in 1988, as I shared before, I stayed for a year at the Krishnamurti Foundation in Varanasi. My very first day was filled with ecstatic experiences. That evening Sudhakar Tiwari, the Hindi teacher in the Krishnamurti School there, came to my cottage and offered to take me to Ganges. I sat on a spot from where I could safely put my feet into the running water. When I was intently looking at the Mother Ganges, I felt Ganga Ma was initiating me with a *mantra*. Elated, I went on chanting the *mantra* for a full three and half hours in a state of spiritual fervour. So much so, it was dark when some people from the Foundation came searching for me in that darkness with flash-lights. They took me back to my cottage. The *mantra* kept on repeating within for days, no matter what I was doing outside.

The very same night, while I was deep in slumber, I was woken by another deeper and stranger happening! Though I was awake, I could not open my eyes. I heard many *pooja* bells ringing in frenzy. The fragrance of flowers, burning incense sticks and camphor filled my room. Suddenly, I heard tens of hundreds of people shouting fervently, "*Har, Har*

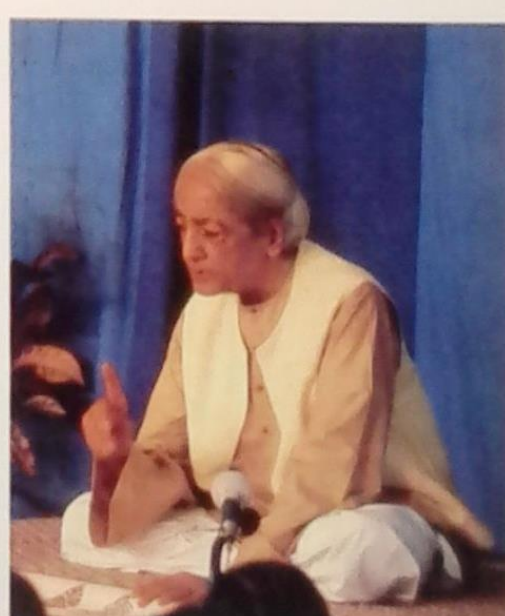
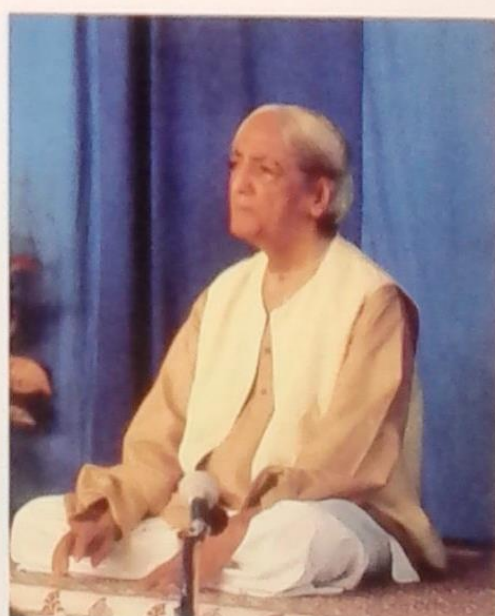
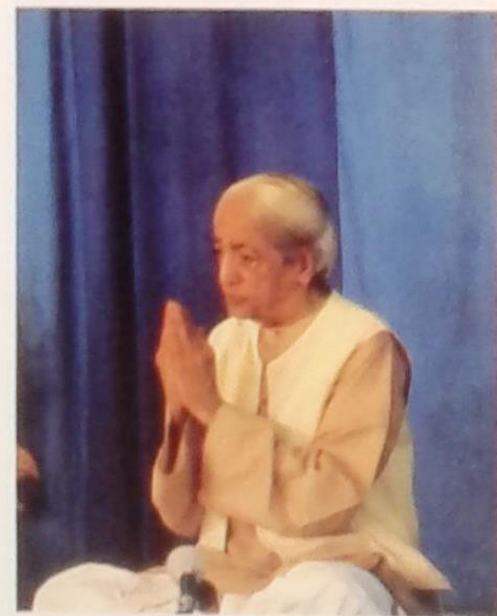
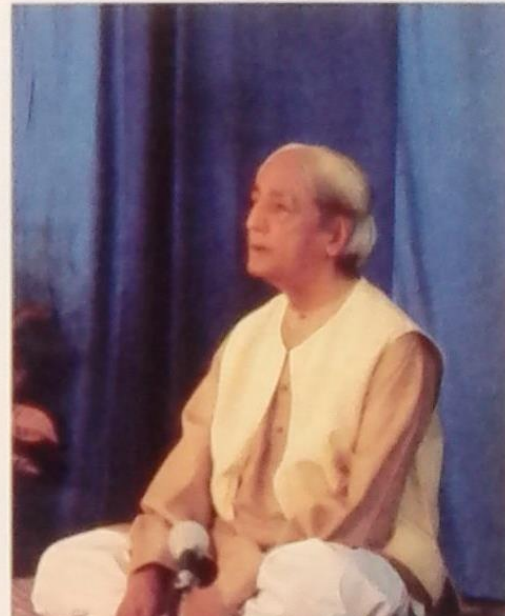
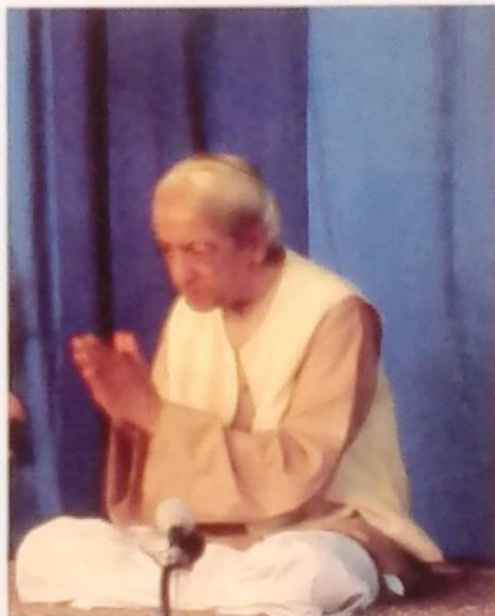
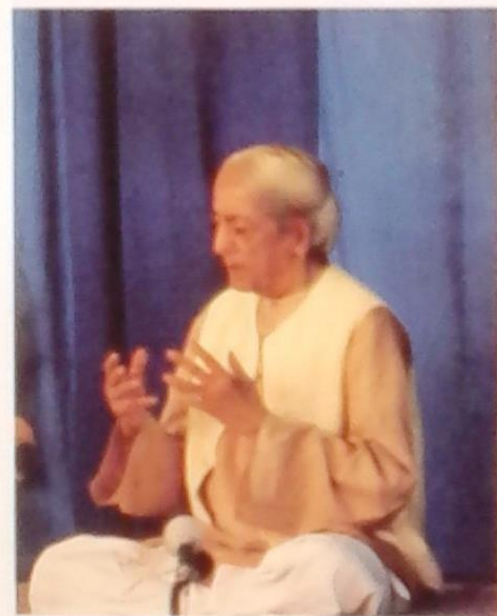
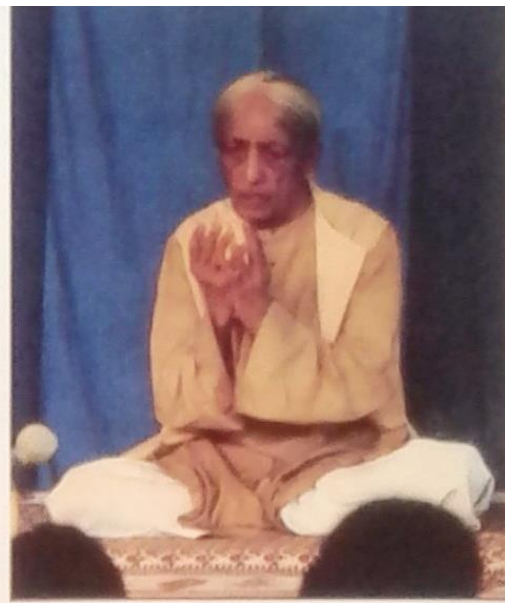
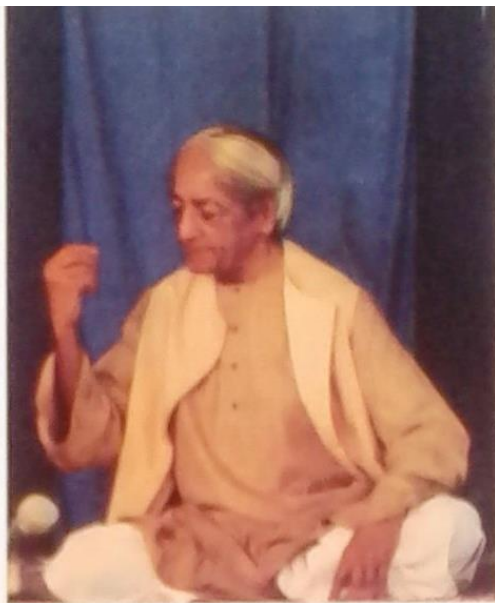
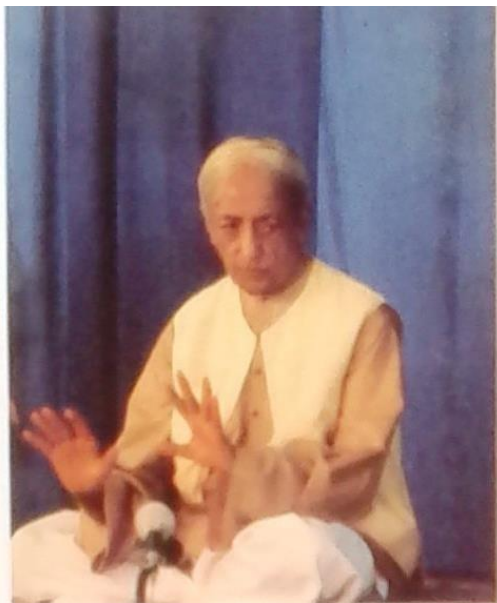
Mahadev !” Then, there was a total silence. I opened my eyes. My whole body quivered with joy and ecstasy. I tried to understand what all had happened. But, my weak mind could not ascertain whether or not all these actually happened.

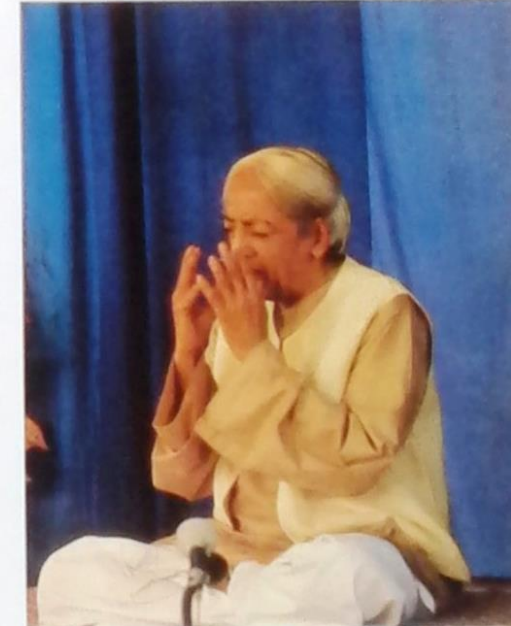
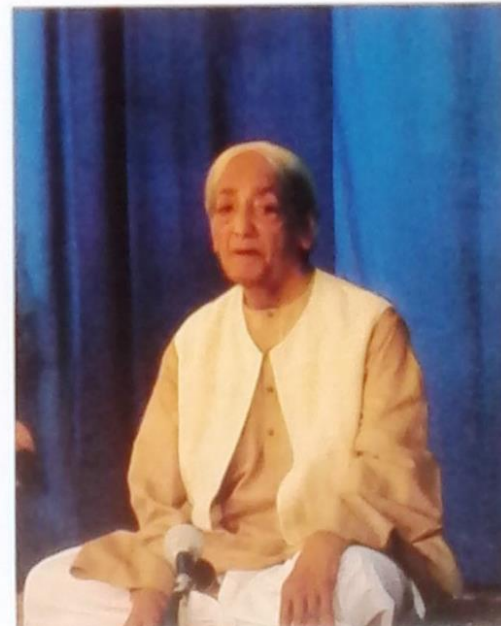
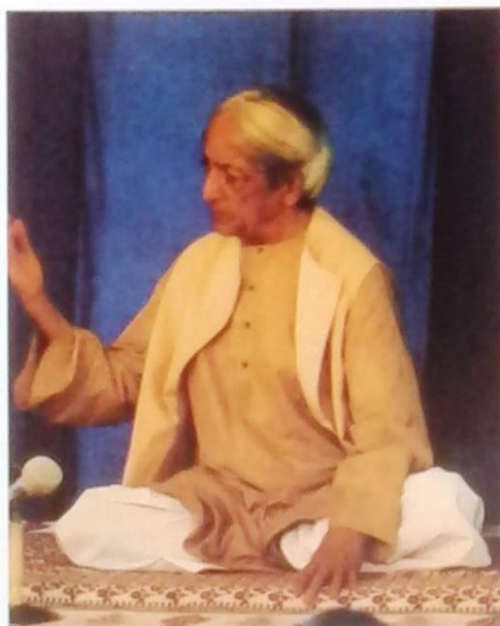
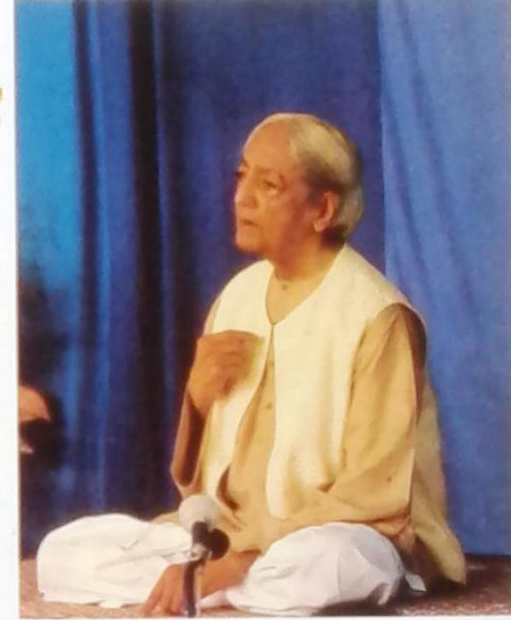
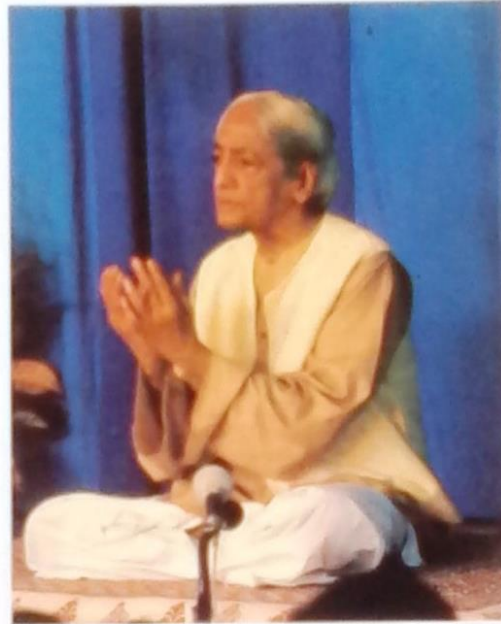
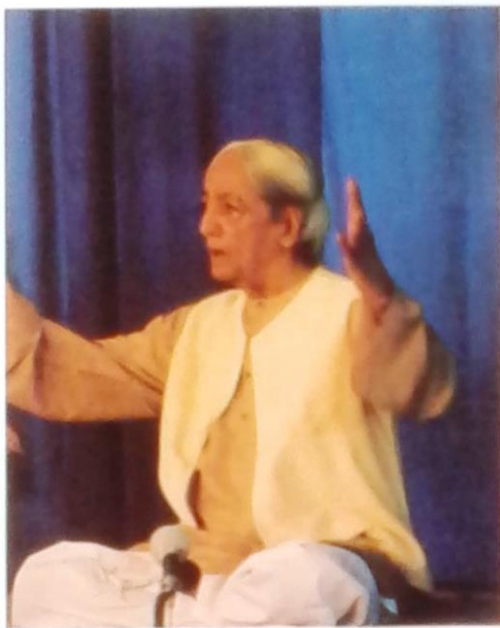
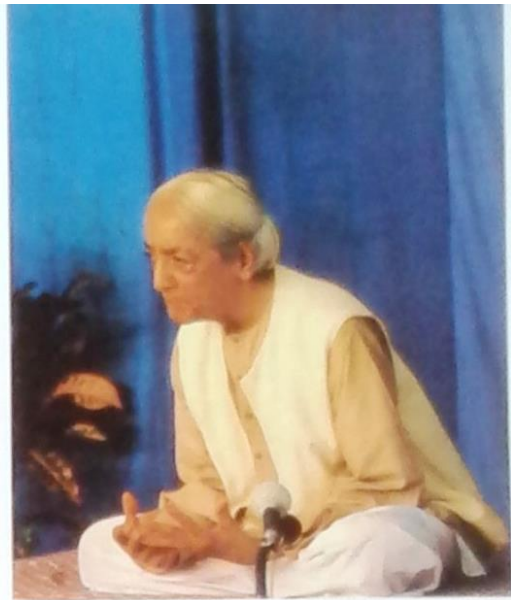
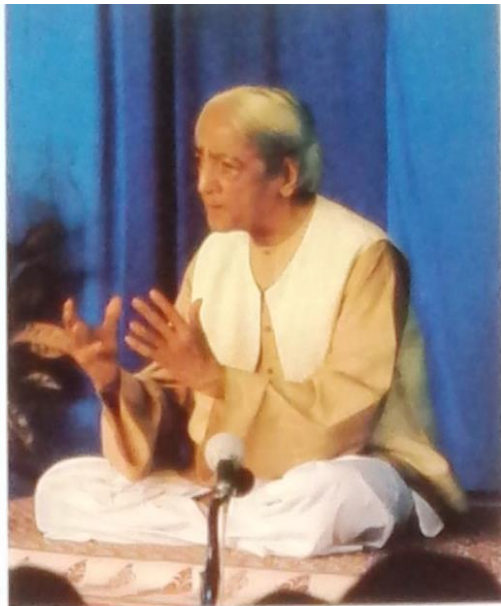
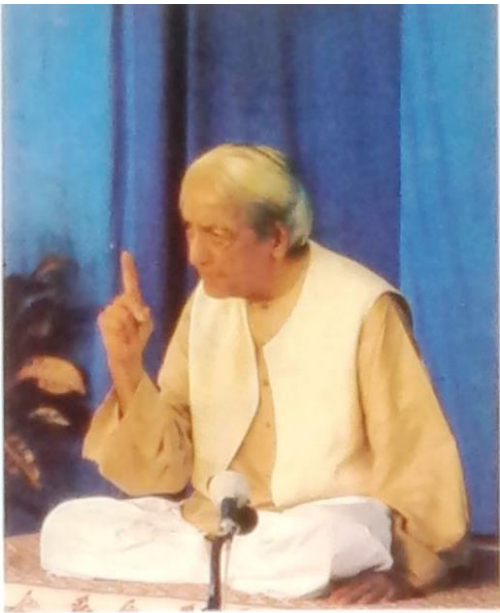


“.....the sacred Banyan tree next to the cottage where I stayed for one year....”

A couple of months later, R.R.Upasani, the secretary of KFI, came to my cottage. We sat outside in the verandah. He had earlier informed me that he would come one day to listen to me talk about the Maharshi and his teachings. However, instead of asking me to tell him about the Maharshi’s teaching, he showed me the ‘banyan tree’ that stood silently next to my cottage and asked me,” Do you know about its significance?” I replied in the negative.

The following is the extraordinary story he told me: “Krishnaji was a mighty spiritual personality! Yet in the beginning of our relationship itself, I had boldly told him that I could not understand his teaching and hence had no pretension of putting them into practice. I loved him deeply and sincerely and would do anything for him. Every day, in the evening, he would request me to accompany him during his long walks. My daily evening routine was to be with him during dinner and see him off at the first floor room of his. I would wait





till he bid me good night and close the doors behind him.”

“One night, he suddenly reopened the closed door, called me back up the stairs and said, ‘Upasaniji! When you come tomorrow, bring a sapling of a banyan plant, a spade, and a bucket of water’. The next day, I brought them and waited. Krishnaji came down and asked me to take him to this piece of land next to which your cottage now stands. Then, it was a rough piece of neglected land overgrown by cacti and other wild bushes. Krishnaji walked up and down there in a state of frenzy. I was worried as there were blood stains on his *pyjamas*, caused by the thorns and cacti. After sometime, he stood still exactly on the spot where the ‘banyan tree’ stands now. Everything he did was very unusual, strange and illogical. He stood with closed eyes for several minutes in deep meditation. Opening his eyes, he called me and said, ‘Upasaniji, Will you please clear this place up and dig a hole to plant the sapling?’ I did as he asked. When I looked up after digging the hole, he asked me, ‘Don’t you have a *mantra* that you chant before planting a banyan sapling in your villages?’ Having studied in an Agricultural College and obtained a master’s degree in it, I affirmed, ‘Yes sir, I know the *mantra* !’ Krishnaji said, ‘Then, chant it and plant the banyan sapling in that place.’ On my plea, he too held the sapling in his hands, and we both planted it with the *mantra* chanted by me. We poured the water around the plant. Krishnaji stood up and remained in a deeply prayerful attitude with closed eyes for a fairly long time. And then, moving away, started walking back in measured steps.

While walking back to his house, I could not control my curiosity. I asked him, ‘Krishnaji, what is the significance of all that happened today? Why was that neglected place chosen for planting the banyan sapling?’

He replied, ‘You want to know why? Because, the original Viswanatha Temple is buried right under the place where the sapling is planted! The Viswanatha Temple that people worship now, is its third location. More than two thousand years ago, the original Viswanatha Temple was here. Though it is buried, it is still active and energetic.’

Upasaniji did not claim to have fully understood this last sentence of Krishnaji’s. But, while listening to Upasaniji, an electric sensation, went through my system. I not only connected it to my experience of bells ringing, *puja* being done, the remarkable aroma of fragrance and a sense of divinity on the first night I stayed in the cottage next to the banyan tree, but it also instantly brought to my mind what Sri Bhagavan had said once about an underground tunnel connecting the Adi Annamalai and Arunachaleswara temples. This tunnel, which went right through the Arunachala Hill, was used by celestial and other higher beings to do *puja* in both the shrines every day! When I shared my own experience and the mystical statement of Sri Ramana, Upasaniji was thrilled, “All these days, Krishnaji’s

revelation remained a puzzle to me and now it is getting cleared. Ganesanji! This frank sharing of yours encourages me to unravel one more mysterious declaration Krishnaji made to me!”

Upasaniji continued, “One day, while taking a walk, Krishnaji turned to me and asked, ‘Upasaniji, do you know why ‘Kashi’ is regarded as the most sacred city by the Hindus?’ I answered, ‘Because of Viswanatha Temple.’ He disagreed and gave me one more chance. ‘Because of Holy River Mother Ganga?’ Krishnaji shook his head and said with a smile, ‘It is because of the Sages and Saints who are always here. Right now, there are nearly forty Sages and Saints in Kashi. Many of them cannot be seen because they stay in hidden underground caves. They will always be here and so, ‘Kashi’ will always be sacred.’

Upasaniji added: “Later on, I did some research and came to know that these Yogis meditated in caves along the banks of the Ganges, and in the rainy season when the river got flooded, sand blocked the passages to these caves and the Yogis remained inside continuing their *tapas*!” Ganesanji! Sages alone know about Sages! Krishnaji is a True Sage!”

Upasaniji added, “Once I asked Krishnaji, ‘Why did you select this particular piece of land for the Foundation?’ Pat came his reply, ‘Because, this is the land that the Buddha’s feet first touched when he arrived in Kashi by boat, after his Enlightenment at Bodh Gaya!’ He did not stop there. He held me by my hand and took me to the exact spot where the Buddha had placed his feet, bent down, touched it and remained silent for some time!”

I requested Upasaniji to show me the spot which remains unmarked and largely unknown to this day. I felt blessed and prostrated. Since then, every time I visit and stay at KFI, Rajghat, without fail I go at least once to that spot and prostrate, with the highest veneration !

* * * * *

Upasaniji became very enthusiastic as he found out that I was not only a very keen listener but also truly deeply involved in preserving the reminiscences of the great masters’ sacred words preserved through the narrations by their senior and mature disciples. The following months, I had many opportunities to share the reminiscences of the the Old Devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi with Upasaniji. He too was immensely pleased while listening to them.

On one such occasion he said, “Ganesan! I too want to share with you an amazing fact. One day, Krishnaji called me and said, ‘Upasaniji! I want to listen to all the four *Vedas* properly chanted. Gather the best *pundits* and great experts on each of the *Vedas*, bring them to Rajghat and make them recite. We should also honour them with all reverence, by



Krishnaji seated on the floor, listening to the 'Vedic chanting'



giving them the best of traditional clothes, shawls and money.' This was arranged and on the specified day, at the auditorium of the school, Krishnaji came and sat along with the audience. He refused to be given a place of honour on the dais and chose to sit on the ground along with others. I told him that I had gathered the presents as described by him and that I would honour each of the Vedic *pundits* with the respect and reverence they deserved, after the chanting was over. He was visibly pleased.

"Then, he sat on the ground facing the dais and the *pundits*. He, as was his wont, sat in silence in the meditative posture and heard with rapt attention. I sat next to him. Ganesan! everyone knows that Krishnaji was an absorbingly charming speaker. But, on that day, I observed what a keen listener Krishnaji was! He was totally absorbed in listening to the chanting from the beginning until the end without any movement of his body. "At the time of honouring the *Vedic Pundits*, as already arranged, the valueable presents were kept in individual plates, and I got up with them to give them away to the *pundits*. I had put 10,000 rupees in an envelope in each plate (the maximum amount one gifted to such *pundits* in those days was only Rs.500 or 1000).

"Krishnaji stood in front of each *Vedic Pundit* and offered his respects with folded hands. Krishnaji surprised me by moving forwards to the dais in front of me. When I offered

him the plate, he took the shawl and put it around the *pundits*. When he came to know that I was giving each one of them 10,000 rupees, he exhibited true joy in his face!

“Ganesan! The sight of this ‘*modern*’ Sage, Krishnaji, honouring the four *Vedas* will forever remain a divine one for me!”

Listening to Upasaniji’s glorious narration, put me in an elated state of fulfillment!

* * * * *

MAHESH SAXENA

I had the good fortune of having the dignified looking, retired Inspector General of Police, Mahesh Saxena, living in the cottage next to mine. When he was the I.G. of Police in Delhi, he happened to be taken to a meeting where Krishnaji was giving a talk. After the talk, Krishnaji called him and asked him to resign his job and join the Foundation.



Mahesh Saxena

Maheshji bluntly told Krishnaji that he followed the traditional method of revering, respecting and worshipping Gurus. That his Guru was ‘Madhav Ashish’, whose Guru was ‘Krishna Prem’, whose Guru in turn was ‘Yashoda Ma’. He told Krishnaji that he did a simple, daily *puja* to all the three of them. And so, if Krishnaji, despite his apparent abhorrence of Guru worship did not object, he would gladly give up his job as an IG of Police and join the Krishnamurti Foundation. Krishnamurti did not object and Maheshji joined the Foundation. An able administrator, he was in due course, made the Secretary of the Foundation. I was told that under his guidance, the institution progressed really well.

Some years later, Krishnaji was giving his annual talk at the KFI in Varanasi. On that day, Krishnaji was scathing in his criticism of those who worship their Gurus. Maheshji felt very hurt. He waited until the talk was over and then went up to Krishnaji with apparent sadness and disappointment on his face. He told Krishnaji, “Sir, I told you at the very beginning itself that I have three Gurus and that I do worship them daily, privately. You accepted it and said that it was alright. Today, you scathingly attacked my doing so by publicly pointing it out and condemning it. I am deeply hurt. Sir, if this is how you feel, I am ready to tender my resignation”.

Krishnaji, with a warm smile, gave a pat on Maheshji’s back and replied, “Did I personally point you out and make that statement ? Did I condemn you ? Have I not

already accepted your Guru worship ? So, why feel hurt ? Search Sir, your mind and find out the reason, for yourself. Something within is hurting you. Can it be the ego which has anyhow to be given up finally, Sir ? The Guru is the dispeller of the ego ! Be strong ! Follow your own Heart ! Ever do what is best for you, Sir ! Stay still, within.” Maheshji happily continued in the Foundation until Krishnaji passed away !

G. NARAYAN

G. Narayan was the nephew of Krishnamurti. He was exceptionally gentle and cheerful and like many others around Krishnaji, unreservedly gave his whole life and energy to the study of the teaching and service to the Foundation. He was the Director of Krishnamurti School in Rishi Valley. Narayan regarded Krishnaji to be a ‘World Teacher’ – one who pointed the world towards ‘freedom from all illusions’. As a person who had himself spent over thirty years teaching school children, Narayan recognized Krishnaji as a rare and exceptional teacher who shared his insights about exploring different paths to right education with those who gathered around him, with the same urgent concern.

I had the privilege of receiving Narayan at Sri Ramanasramam and spending fairly long periods discussing and sharing the teachings of both Krishnamurti and the Maharshi, since Narayan had clarity in upholding the ancient principle : “The ‘Teaching’ is the ‘Teacher’”.



Krishnaji with G.Narayan -- the Principal of Rishi Valley School

It was the time I was engaged deeply with the problem concerning the printing press, which I had mentioned in an earlier talk on Yogi Ramsuratkumar. Since Yogiji had directed me to spend one year on the banks of Mother Ganga, I was worried over the problem of where to stay in Kashi for such a long time. Narayan came to my help at the right moment and said, “You can stay in our Krishnamurti Foundation, Rajghat. Professor Krishna is the Rector of the institution. Write to him and he will help you.” Thanks to the initial yet vital push given by Narayan, I could stay happily for one full year at the Krishnamurti Foundation, Rajghat. For that, I am deeply indebted to both Narayan and Prof. Krishna.

During my close association with Narayan, I was keen to know from him about any power of spiritual healing that Krishnaji had revealed. Narayan was kind enough to narrate the following incident. He also pointed out the possibility of what the Sages expose to us may be only a tiny portion of the vast infinite mystical side of the Truth. He said :

“A gentleman once came to see Krishnaji. His wife had broken her knee and it was not possible to set it right as something fleshy was between the broken edges. As a result, it was decomposing. The man was very concerned and came to see if Krishnaji could heal her and restore the leg. Otherwise, the doctors would have to amputate it. Krishnaji agreed to see her, though he was not sure of the outcome. But the man was keen and brought his wife the next day. She had to be carried in, on a stretcher. She was brought up the steps in “Vasanth Vihar” and Krishnaji came out of his room. They met on the verandah, and from the stretcher the lady caught a glimpse of Krishnaji’s eyes. Their eyes met just for an instant. But, that was enough – the woman got up on her feet and walked. The husband was grateful that his wife could walk again. Krishnaji turned to me and said, ‘Old boy, I think they were pulling my leg.’ ”

But, the next day, the daughter of the woman came to see him and told Krishnamurti, “Do you know what you have done, Sir ? It is a miracle !” She put a flower garland round his neck, a traditional gesture of regard and expressed gratitude for the help rendered to her mother.

Narayan said, “I asked Krishnaji as we walked along, if it was ‘faith healing ?’. He replied in the negative. I persisted, “Then, how did it happen ?” “Somewhere something clicks,” answered Krishnaji. We reached the beach and Krishnaji walked very fast and I followed him. I asked him what it was that clicked ? Krishnaji said, “Energy passes. Don’t ask me anymore.”

* * * * *

PROF. PADMANABHAN KRISHNA

In 1988, I met Professor P. Krishna [Rector of KFI, Rajghat] who narrated to me some interesting anecdotes about Krishnamurti :

“Krishnaji was at times unpredictable. He would walk into the children’s dining hall and start eating with them. Once, when he did so here in Rajghat, Upasaniji and others followed him. The *dhall* had been served and Krishnaji was eating it in the normal way. But, Upasaniji and others found it too salty. On enquiry, it was confirmed that the cook had mistakenly added salt twice ! Concerned, Upasaniji asked Krishnaji, “Sir, how are you eating it ? It has too much salt.” Krishnaji lifted his head up and smilingly concurred, “Yes, Sir ! It is salty.” Prof.Krishna said that Krishnaji never complained about anything personal, though he was very firm and vocal in taking contrary stand when needed about matters concerning the Foundation. To illustrate this further, the Professor narrated the following.

“ Sunandaji [Sunanda Padwardhan] was hosting Krishnaji in Madras. One evening when Radhaji [Radha Burnier] went to see Krishnaji, she noticed there were a lot of mosquitoes in his room. Right in their midst sat Krishnaji unmindful of it all. She asked Krishnaji, ‘Sir ! There are so many mosquitoes. How do you tolerate them ?’ Krishnaji smiled in a nonchalant way and replied, “Yes. There are mosquitoes !” There was not a trace of irritation or complaint in his voice !

I asked Professor whether he felt any fear while approaching Krishnamurti, anytime. He answered, “No. I used to hesitate only, because I did not want to disturb him. But, fear ? Never ! And, Ganesan, this was not just me. Almost everyone close to Krishnaji had the same feeling. There used to be awe, wonder, respect and admiration; but, fear ? Never !” Then, I asked him whether Krishnaji had a special attachment to anyone in particular. He said, “Krishnaji had deep affection, but never any form of attachment. In fact, there was a time when Krishnaji could not stay at “Vasant Vihar” and Jayalakshmi was putting him up in her house and was looking after his comfort with care, affection and attention. While leaving the house, Krishnaji said, ‘Sir! I hope she will understand me. When I walk out of the house, there is no more ‘her’ in my memory !”

In answer to his question, Krishnaji once told the Professor that there was no trace of any memory of his brother Nitya – he could not even recollect Nitya’s face. Then, Krishnaji of his own accord added, “Amma, of course, I can recall the outline of her face. But only outline !” After some moments, Krishnaji told him, “Of course, Sir ! If I want to, I can bring them back and see ! They are all stored up, somewhere.” Then, pointing to his own head, he concluded, “But not in here. I can beckon them though, at any time !”



Krishnaji's residence at Rajghat, Varanasi

Prof. P. Krishna and Smt. Minakshi Krishna came to visit Sri Ramanasramam on the invitation of the President of our Ashram (my father). Anuradha and I were delighted to receive them and take them around. On being requested by them, we took the delightful couple to Yogi Ramsuratkumar at the site where his ashram was fast coming up. That day, there was a good gathering of devotees and Yogiji was seated on the raised dais.

I sat next to Prof. Krishna and Minakshi Ma in the front row. After some time, I took the couple to Yogiji and introduced them. Yogiji drew me closer and asked me in a whisper, "Will you please get permission from the Professor for this 'Beggar' to hold his wife Minakshi's hands?" "Of course, yes!" was Professor's immediate response. Yogiji held Minakshi Ma's hands -- put them on his eyes and on his head; and said, "Thank you Professor! Thank you Minakshi Ma! This 'Beggar' is amply blessed to hold the hands that were touched and blessed by Sri Krishnaji!"

The significance of this glorious encounter will be clear only when one reads the following quotation from the book *KRISHNAMURTI: A LIFE; 'THE OPEN DOOR'* by Mary Lutyens. (Ch.10, p.671-2).

* * * * *

(The following conversation took place in Krishnaji's room at Rajghat, Varanasi, on November 7, 1985. Prof. Krishna was then the Head of the Department of Physics, in the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.)

Krishnamurti: Sir, I am not going to be around for long. I happen to know when I am going to go, but I will not tell anybody. Before I go, I want to put my house in order, and I want you to take charge of this place. It is a sacred place, it was handed over to me by Mrs. Besant and I want to hand it over to you. Will you take it?

P. Krishna: Sir, I feel overwhelmed by your offer, but I don't know what all it implies. I don't know anything about this place and what they do here. Nor do I know what exactly you want me to do.

Krishnamurti: I will tell you. I want you to come and live here, make this your home for life. You understand, I mean *for life*. It is yours to build, to do what you like with it. It is being offered to you like a *jewel on a silver platter* and I am asking you, will you take it?

P.K.(baffled): Sir, I am not sure you should trust me so much, you hardly know me.

Krishnamurti: Don't say that. I know you enough and I trust you completely.

P. Krishna: But Sir I am a very ordinary man. I don't know if I can do what you want.



Prof.P. Krishna

Krishnamurti: (interrupting): Sir, sir, I am also *a very ordinary man*. Don't say all this. The son does not say all this to his father when he is dying and wants to leave him something. He doesn't say 'no', he accepts it. It comes to you like that, take it like that.

P.K. (in tears): Sir, I am not saying no, I am saying I would like to do it for you, but I am not sure if I can, if I am the right person for it. I am so young and inexperienced. Sir, give me time to consider it.

Let me see what all there is here, what needs to be done, whether I can do it. I don't want to accept something I cannot do well; I would be letting you down.

Krishnamurti: No sir, I want you to tell me 'Yes', from here (pointing to the heart). Then if it is all right with you we will sort out all the other problems together. I want you to say 'yes' before you go today, but I am not persuading you Sir, if you understand what I mean.

P. Krishna: Yes sir, I understand. You are not persuading me and I have told you that I would very much like to do it but I want some time to consider all the implications of it, for my family, for myself and above all whether I can make a success of it. I am not looking at it as a job offer and I am not trying to bargain with you. But I have never taken decisions in life this way. I have always considered things carefully and planned my life, so I want to have some time to consider all aspects of it and then give you my final acceptance.

Krishnamurti: Wait sir, let me ask your wife (takes her hands into his and looks at her intently). My dear, darling, will you do this for me? Will you come and live here, make this your home?

Minakshi (in tears): Yes sir, we will do anything for you. We will come and live here.

Krishnamurti: (Looking at P. Krishna): See, it is finished! You are still arguing.



P. Krishna: No sir, I am not arguing but I am diffident. I know what you want done and I do not think I can do it. I will be letting you down.

Minakshi Ma

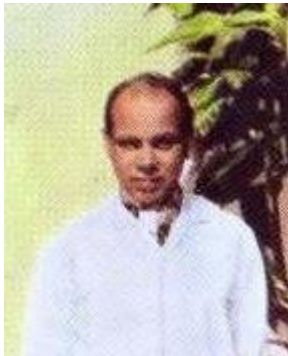
Krishnamurti: Sir, if we think that is the right thing to do, that is what we should be doing. Whether it succeeds or not is not our concern.

P. Krishna: I agree that children should be brought up and educated the way you have pointed out.

Krishnamurti: Right, its done! That's all!

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Dr. S. BALASUNDARAM



Dr.S.Balasundaram

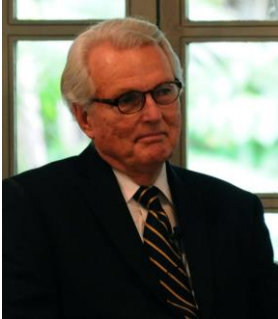
Dr.S. Balasundaram was the Principal of the Krishnamurti School at Rishi Valley. His wife, Visalakshi, was a devotee of Sri Bhagavan even before she got married. Dr.Balasundaram had also had *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan. Consequently, both of them were very fond of me. Their affection for me was also because of my deep interest in Krishnaji and his teaching.

Dr.Balasundaram used to share many interesting anecdotes involving him and Krishnaji. They are all absorbingly interesting. One incident though, got deeply imprinted in my heart.

He said that he was intrigued about the state that Krishnaji was always rooted in. He knew Krishnaji to be an extraordinary human being. Thus, he was praying within his heart to Krishnaji to reveal his true state of being. One day, Krishnaji was coming down the stairs to get into the car. Dr.Balasundaram rushed to put his right hand on the car door's handle. It so happened that Krishnaji too tried to open the same door at that very moment. As a result, Krishnaji's hand gripped Dr.Balasundaram's hand – just for a few moments.

Dr. Balasundaram lost his body consciousness and was in a state of inner ecstasy. Krishnaji too, did not take away his hand and willingly allowed the 'flow of energy' to pass through Balasundaram's hand. When the moment passed, Krishnamurti looked deeply at Balasundaram and remarked, "Are you happy, now?"

MARK LEE and ASHA LEE



Mark Lee

Krishnaji, had his initial spiritual break-through experience at the Adyar beach in Chennai even at a tender age. He had his final spiritual experience when he was at Ojai, America, under a 'pepper tree'. (Have you not noticed how "trees" play a significant role in spiritual attainment? Lord Dakshinamurti sat under a "Banyan tree" and the Buddha got enlightenment under the "Bodhi Tree"?). Ojai became his permanent residence. On reading about this glorious turn of events in Krishnaji's life, I was very eager to go to Ojai and meditate under the 'sacred tree'.

In 1990, when I took my first pilgrimage abroad under the insistence of Yogi Ramsuratkumar, Joan and Mathew Greenblatt helped me fulfill this deep inner urge. They contacted Mark Lee and got a small but comfortable house next to the compound of Krishnamurti Foundation of America reserved for my stay. When I was introduced to Asha Lee and Mark Lee I felt like I was in the presence Sri Bhagavan's Old Devotees – both were that exceptionally kind and affectionate. The next morning, I went to where the 'pepper tree' still stands. Sitting under it, I lost myself in meditation. I was rudely woken up by an American who announced that he was the gardener. He told me in no uncertain terms that he would not allow anyone to sit under the tree, as the property belonged to a private person [Mary Zimbalist]. I humbly answered him that I was coming from far off India and for years I had dreamt of meditating under the 'pepper tree'. He continued to be rude and even threatened to call the police. I closed my eyes and went back to meditation after firmly, but politely, telling him to do whatever he wanted.



Asha Lee

Suddenly, I felt someone touch me softly on my shoulders. It was Mark Lee! He affectionately told me, "Ganesan! Your body was leaning so much to one side that it was about to fall. That is why I woke you up. Please pardon me."



“.....lost in meditation under the ‘Pepper Tree’.....”

During my meditation under the sacred tree, I felt an inner explosion taking place, confirming that there was only one Truth and that there was nothing other than the Truth ! Meanwhile, Mark Lee had spoken to the concerned people. He assured me that I could meditate there, any time.

Almost every time I toured USA since then, I made it a point to make Ojai a part of my itinerary and spend hours in deep meditation under that divine tree.

Later, Mark Lee fulfilled another deep and secret urge of mine. I always felt (and still feel) Krishnaji’s true teaching and Sri Bhagavan’s direct teaching are similar. So, I wanted to give talks on Sri Bhagavan’s direct teaching of Self-Enquiry in that Krishnamurti Centre. Soon afterwards, Mark told me that there was financial crunch in the KFA and they had decided to hold retreats and collect a fee for the boarding and lodging. I felt Krishnaji himself was urging me to hold a retreat on “Who Am I?”

When I expressed this to Mark Lee, he gave me a pleasant surprise by informing me that I could hold my ‘Retreat’ at the very “Pine Cottage” itself ! It was Krishnaji’s residence; and, the venue where he met with and spoke to advanced spiritual souls. In great elation I told Mark that I would conduct a retreat on “Who Am I?” there, for three days. He readily agreed; and, I successfully completed the Retreat, in June, 2006. The hall at the “Pine

Cottage” was small and could hold only fifteen participants. I felt both Sri Bhagavan and Krishnaji together were blessing me and every one of the participants ! Two sessions were held, every day – in the morning and evening. It was a remarkable revelation for every one who participated, as how easy Self-Enquiry is and how effective it is to pursue the inner journey.

PUPUL JAYAKAR



Pupul Jayakar

The renowned Pupul Jayakar – the reputed author of the biography on J.Krishnamurti – came to KFI, during the period I was staying there. Prof. Krishna was keen that I meet with her and talk to her. Pupulji was very kind and courteous to me. I expressed to her my deep gratitude for having brought out in her book the important aspect of Krishnamurti being an Indian and yet universal in his outlook. Other biographers had presented him, I told her, as if he was influenced only by the European culture.

She wanted me tell her about the Maharshi and his life. After listening, she bluntly put a question: “Can you put the Maharshi’s teaching in one sentence?” Without any hesitation I answered, “*Chittham Sirithasaya Samsaaram. Chittham Nilai Nirkka Mukti Siddhamidhu* ”, meaning, “When the mind (*chitta*) oscillates it is *samsara* (worldly bondage). When the mind stands still that is *mukthi* (liberation, freedom). This is certain.”

Pupulji was visibly affected on hearing it and clasped her hands in appreciation. She wanted me to not only repeat it but also give it to her in writing, as she said, she had never heard anything as crisp, as profound and as simple, a definition of Truth as Sri Bhagavan’s! I felt very happy!

MARY LUTYENS



Mary Lutyens

Mary Lutyens, the author of many books on Krishnamurti, was staying at the Brockwood Park School of Krishnamurti in England. Thanks to Alan Jacobs (the then Chairman, Ramana Maharshi Centre, London), I too happened to go over there. When I suddenly met her face to face in an open corridor, my emotions surged up and I spontaneously prostrated to her. She was embarrassed! Yet, I not only had the great satisfaction of having prostrated to a noble follower of Krishnamurti but also felt profusely blessed.

MARY ZIMBALIST

Years later when I was meditating under the ‘Pepper Tree’ in Ojai, California, I was informed that Mary Zimbalist was living there in Krishnamurti’s home. This noble lady had been of paramount help and assistance to Krishnamurti. So much so that whenever Krishnamurti toured abroad, he would daily write a letter to her about what had happened on that day.

When I rang the bell, a beautiful lady came out with the help of a crutch. As I saw her, I could not control my joy, gratitude and reverence on having the *darshan* of this most helpful attendant of Krishnamurti. I fell flat in full prostration to her. She was taken aback. When I sought her blessings, she demurred. But then, she gave me the most glorious smile !



Mary Zimbalist

The seekers who were drawn to Ramana Maharshi and Krishnamurti were -- broadly speaking -- quite different: faithful believers in age-old traditions, on the one hand, and thoroughly skeptical modern minds, on the other. Their common purpose, though, is to “Be” the “Truth”!

Perhaps I have over-simplified matters. Yet, the fact that both the Masters addressed the ‘individual’ is undeniable. The ‘individual’ alone is the Truth. This, for me, is the essence of the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and J. Krishnamurti:

“Who am I?” of Sri Ramana Maharshi ; and,

“You are the world.” of J. Krishnamurti

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- 1, 6, 7 -- *Years of Awakening* by Mary Lutyens
- 3 -- ‘*The Mountain Path*’ , January, 1988
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- 8 -- *Truth is a Pathless Land* by Ingram Smith
- 10 -- *Self Realisation* by B.V. Narasimha Swami
- 11,14,16,18,20,22,24 -- *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*
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NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ



Life

When asked about the date of his birth, Nisargadatta Maharaj replied casually that he was never born ! However, some of his elderly relatives say that he was born at Bombay in April, 1897, on a Full Moon day. It was also the “Hanuman *Jayanthi* ” – the birthday of the “Monkey God” of “*Ramayana*” fame. To associate his birth with this auspicious day, his parents named him “*Maruti*” (another name of ‘Hanuman’). During his boyhood years, he worked on his parent’s small farm, in the nearby village. Although he grew up with little or no formal education, he was exposed to religious ideals by his father's friend -- a pious and learned *Brahmin*.

Maruti's father died when the boy was eighteen, leaving behind his wife and six children. Maruti and his older brother left the farm to look for work in Bombay. After a brief stint as a clerk, Maruti opened a shop selling tobacco and leaf-rolled cigarettes, called *beedies*. The shop was modestly successful and Maruti was married in 1924. A son and three daughters soon followed.

When Maruti was 34, he met his *Guru*, Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

Nisargadatta Maharaj himself narrated what transpired between him and his *Guru* :

“My *Guru* ordered me to attend to the sense 'I AM' and to give attention to nothing else. I just obeyed. I did not follow any particular course of breathing, or meditation, or study of scriptures. Whatever happened, I would turn away my attention from it and remain with the sense 'I AM'. It may look too simple, even crude. My only reason for doing it was that my *Guru* told me so. Assuredly, it worked!”

As Sri Bhagavan would say : “Just to ***BE***. Not to be ‘*this*’ or ‘*that*’. Just ***BE***.”

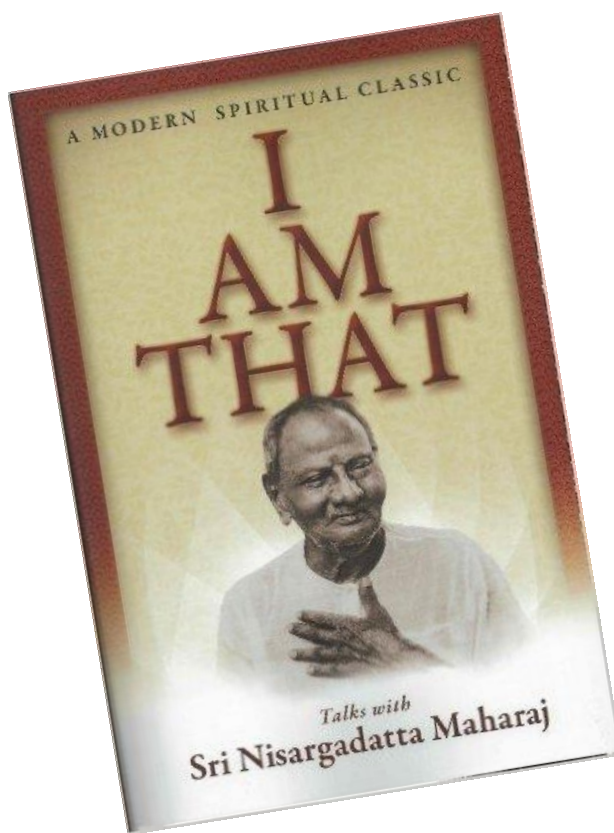
While seriously practising, something exploded within Maruti, as it were, giving birth to a Cosmic Consciousness – a sense of Eternal Life – and thus, emerged the illuminating personality “**Nisargadatta Maharaj**”.

Within three years, Maruti realized the Truth and took the new name “Nisargadatta”. [‘*Nisargadatta*’, means “naturally (*nisarga*) given (*datta*)” or, more loosely, “one dwelling in the natural state.” It also means, “*Nis-arga*” “without parts,” and suggests “the unfragmented, seamless, solid state of Awareness of a Sage”]. He became a *sadhu*, roamed about in the Himalayas and walked all over India, but eventually returned to Bombay where he lived for the rest of his life, working as a cigarette vendor and giving spiritual discourses in his *beedie*-selling shop.

Thanks to the untiring services rendered by Maurice Frydman, his teachings were first translated into English in the book “***I Am That***”, which was first published in 1973. It made him well known across the world and brought many Western devotees to his humble tenement, where he had started giving *sat sanghs*.



Maurice Frydman



He was 84 years old, when he attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1981.

Some Quotes of Nisargadatta Maharaj

“Sometimes I know that I am ‘everything’, and I call that “Love”. Sometimes I know that I am ‘nothing’, and I call that “Wisdom”. Between “Love” and “Wisdom” my life continually flows.”

“Don't you see that all your problems are your body's problems — food, clothing, shelter, family, friends, fame, name, security, survival — all these lose their meaning, the moment you realize that you may not be a mere body.”

“When you are no longer attached to anything, you have done your share. The rest will be done ‘for’ you. By whom? By the same ‘Power’ that brought you so far, that prompted your heart to desire Truth and your mind to seek it. It is the same ‘Power’ that keeps you alive. You may call it ‘Life’ or the ‘Supreme’. Remember that language is an instrument of the ‘mind’, it is made by the mind for the mind.”

“It is the ‘mind’ that tells you that the ‘mind’ is there. Don't be deceived. All the endless arguments about the ‘mind’ are produced by the ‘mind’ itself, for its protection, continuation and expansion. It is the blank refusal to consider the convolutions and convulsions of the ‘mind’ that can take you beyond it.”

“Our usual attitude is of : ‘I am this’. Separate consistently and perseveringly the ‘I Am’ from ‘*this*’ or ‘*that*’ and try to feel what it means to be – just to **BE** – without being ‘*this*’ or ‘*that*’.

“To know the world you forget the **Self**, to know the **Self** you forget the world.”

“Don't pretend to be *what you are not*, don't refuse to be **what you are**.”

“If you do not care for ‘pleasure’, you will not be afraid of ‘pain’.”

“What you need will come to you if you do not ask for what you **do not need**.”

“The essence of saintliness is total acceptance of the present moment, harmony with things as they happen.”

“Desire is the root cause of all suffering. We suffer more by the desire for things than by lack of things.”

“As long as you are a beginner, certain formalized meditations and prayers may be good for you. But, for a seeker of **‘Reality’**, there is only one meditation - the rigorous refusal to harbour ‘thoughts’. To be free from ‘thoughts’ is itself Meditation.”

“Because you know **you are**, you know the world is. You also know that God is. If you don't know **you are**, where is the world and where is the God?”

“This itself is the greatest miracle, that I got the news **“I AM.”** Have you any doubts that **you are** ?”

“As I tell you, abide in yourself, be your ‘own being’, then only you will get that peace and quietude. *Just be* what **you are**. When you abide in your own Self, all your questions will be dissolved by the knowledge **“you are.”**

“Establish yourself firmly in the awareness of **‘I AM’**. This is the beginning and also the end of all endeavour.”

“Relax and watch the **‘I AM’**. **‘Reality’** is just behind it. Keep quiet, keep silent; it will emerge, or rather, it will take you in.”

“What matters supremely is sincerity, earnestness.”

“The desire to find the **‘SELF’** will be surely fulfilled, provided you want nothing else. But, you must be honest with yourself and really want nothing else.”

“How long do you do this type of meditation? Until you stabilize in the conviction: I am the knowledge **“I AM.”** At that stage your individuality is completely extinguished; you no longer have a personality. And “you” denotes the manifested. In place of the lost ‘individuality’, has come the manifest **‘Totality’**.”



Nisargadatta Maharaj

MAHARAJ AND ME

In the 1970's, I received letters from the two reputed writers and spiritual seekers - Wei Wu Wei and Douglas E. Harding - telling me about Nisargadatta Maharaj and his book "***I Am That***". They said that after Sri Bhagavan's "***Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi***", they admired this book the most. Both of them urged me to visit Maharaj and share my experiences. As I felt that I had the privilege of being Sri Bhagavan's devotee, I wondered why I should take time off to visit other Gurus. At any rate, who was I to comment on Saints and Sages?

Whenever I visited cities and big towns on Ashram work, I would never fail to devote one day to visit the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan living there, who have had the great good fortune of having Sri Bhagavan's *darshan* or being with Sri Bhagavan. I would prostrate to them and spend some time with them. Mrs. Soona Nicholson, daughter of Framji Dorabji, a Parsi devotee of Sri Bhagavan, was one of them. When I reached her house on one of my visits to Bombay, she asked me to hop into her car. On the way, she told me that she was taking me to a Saint, without naming him. She said, "Ganesh! Don't expect the countenance of Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Bhagavan. In fact, he looks like a village farmer." Instantly, within my Heart I prostrated to that Saint, for, it never mattered to me whether a 'Saint' was male, female, learned or illiterate.

That Saint turned out to be **Nisargadatta Maharaj**. He was sitting alone in his room. The moment Maharaj looked at me, I felt a flood of peace and quietude flowing into me. Soona was right. Maharaj could easily pass for a rustic farmer. But what a powerful unmistakable spiritual presence! I prostrated to Maharaj. Maharaj lifted up his right hand, the index finger pointing somewhere up. My eyes were riveted on his. The more I was with him the more ecstatic I became.

Maharaj spoke only in his mother tongue Marathi or in Hindi. I knew neither. Soona acted as my interpreter. Maharaj said to me, "Ask some question." Soona translated his words. I heard them but could not respond. Soona again insisted, "Ask Maharaj some question." I kept silent. When Maharaj repeated himself for the third time, Soona nudged me and asked me to say some thing. Looking deeply into the eyes of Maharaj, I said : "I have no questions to ask, Maharaj. But, I would like to listen to you!" Maharaj laughed loudly and tapped forcefully on my lap.

Then, suddenly, he became very serious. He directed his pointed look at me. Words rushed out from him! "Just as an orthodox Brahmin will look down upon a non-vegetarian dish, a *sadhaka* (seeker) should look down upon the 'I-am-the-body-idea'" ! He repeated it

thrice and each time Soona translated it into English. I felt I was being pushed inwards and felt a mental peace which I have never had before. At that very moment, I lost my body-consciousness; and, sat silently for quite sometime. Then, Maharaj smiled broadly, touched me and looked at me with approval and affection.

Soona introduced me as the grand-nephew of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Then, Maharaj gestured to me to look above his head.

There was a large framed photo of Sri Bhagavan. I then remembered that his raised finger had pointed to it even while I prostrated to him earlier. He then said that Sri Bhagavan and he were brothers. So, I was his grandson, as well. When I expressed my desire to offer money in homage, he said that according to Hindu custom only elders can give 'gifts' to youngsters and not the *vice versa*. He wanted me to visit him every time I was in Bombay. He also told his family that I should be allowed to meet him at any time, any day! I felt immensely blessed!

Maharaj always received me with tender love and great affection. Once, when I was with him alone, a few Americans came in. They said that they had already read "**I Am That**" and would love to hear him talk. There was no interpreter with us. I did not even know a smattering of Hindi. Maharaj told me, "Tell them that I will be talking in their language this evening at the J.J. School of Arts grounds. Ask them to come there." They said "J. Krishnamurti is giving a talk there this evening. Is Maharaj also going to speak?" Maharaj smiled and told me, "Tell them. We are three brothers. Ramana Maharshi, J.Krishnamurti and I. We give the same teaching in different languages and styles. Ask them not to miss listening to Krishnamurti!"

In September, 1978, the Board of Trustees of Sri Ramanasramam deputed me to tour all over India. I was to visit major cities, meet the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan and gather their suggestions on how best to celebrate Sri Bhagavan's Birth Centenary in 1980. Dates for my travel by train were all fixed and the necessary ticket reservations made. I went to Bombay and met the devotees there. The next day, I was to leave for Baroda on the next lap of my journey. I went to take the blessings of Maharaj in the evening.

Seeing me, he expressed joy and said, "I want you to stay with me for eight days. You should be with me continuously for eight days, without a break." I was stunned. I had not yet told him that I had to leave for Baroda the next day as part of my All India tour. Maharaj must have read my thoughts, for he hurried to add, "Not necessarily this time but I do want you to stay for eight days with me, sometime!"

On January 18, 1979, I reported myself to Maharaj in the evening and waited for his instructions. He commanded me, “Come tomorrow morning at 8 o’clock sharp!” I prostrated to him and took leave. This is what I had written in my diary [the only time I ever wrote a diary — never before have I done so].

19-1-1979 (Diary Entry)

Morning 6.40: Left home at Juhu and boarded train at Andheri; reached Grant Road station and walked to Maharaj’s house. When I stepped into his room, the wall-clock chimed. It was 8 o’ clock !

[Maharaj had asked me to be with him between 8 and 10 a.m. for 8 continuous days]

Maharaj was alone. Just after his bath, with a towel around his waist, he shone like the early morning Sun. He was fresh and full of energy. His daughter-in-law came and started making preparations for the *puja*, like making garlands, etc. He placed a cushion on the floor and asked me to sit on it. When I looked at him enquiringly, he added reassuringly, “You need not do anything. Just keep looking at me!” He went to the other side of the room and performed *puja*, with meticulous one-pointed attention.



“.....Maharaj was alone at his place of puja.....”

After 10 a.m. Maharaj asked me to stay next to him and offered me tea. He again placed a cushion next to him and bade me sit on it. Then he commenced his talk. Pointing me out to the audience he said that he was giving a special talk in my honour. The essence of the talk was on *Atman* ['I AM'] and how it is nothing but one's own 'simple being'. After a long, torrential outpouring, he turned to me and said, "I will put you a question and you have to answer me, clearly." Then he asked: "Do you agree with all that I said?" When I, overwhelmed with emotion, said, "Yes", Maharaj turned to the audience and said: "All the time, the talk delivered today was given by 'That' which just now said 'Yes'!"

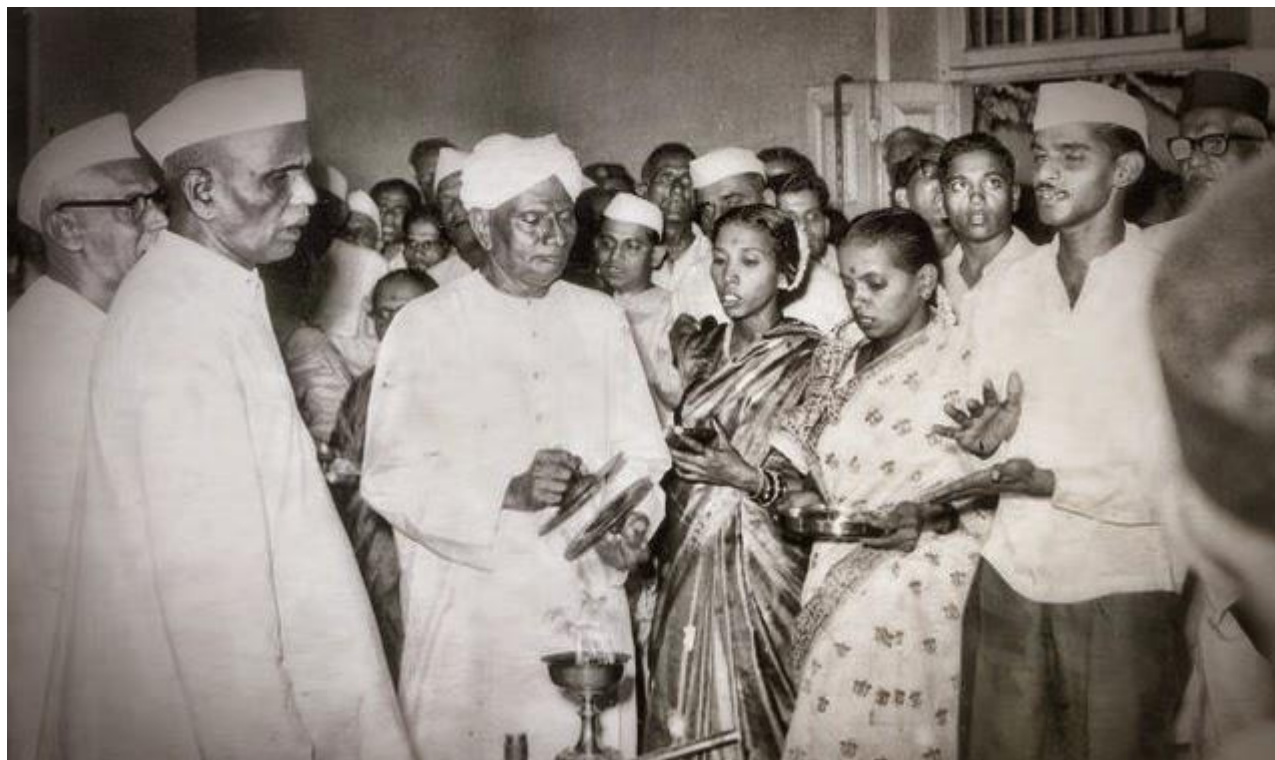
He turned to me and said firmly, "You should give talks daily at Sri Ramanasramam. What you speak does not matter. Whatever you talk will be Sri Bhagavan talking." I pleaded, "Maharaj! I am incompetent, incapable of giving talks. I can't!" Maharaj thundered, "The one who says I can't talk is not going to talk. Open your mouth and 'That' will deliver the talk!" He added, "The one who sees the Sun rise, was before it – that one is 'I AM', that one is 'That', that one is the 'Truth' ."

On the 20th, 21st and 22nd of January too, I reached Maharaj's house at the stroke of 8 o' clock and meditated, sitting on the cushion Maharaj had promptly laid for me. On the 23rd, 24th & 25th Maharaj was away at Nasik. I, however, went to his house and meditated. On 26th I meditated while Maharaj performed his usual *puja*.

On that day, after being seated on the cushion placed for me by Maharaj, my attention was completely pivoted on him. His usual routine was to take from the closed shelf the small idols of Gods, clean and bathe them, clothe them, apply sandal paste, *kumkum* and 'attar' (Indian perfume containing rose essence), and finally perform *puja* to them. He would then carefully replace the idols with absolute reverence. After this was completed, he would climb on a small ladder laid for him by his daughter-in-law (who was totally devoted to him, as a disciple would be to a *Guru*) and repeat this process with all the pictures of Sages and Saints that adorned the walls in the hall. He did this meticulously and perfectly, as I watched with rapt attention.

Suddenly, while Maharaj was applying 'attar' (perfume) with his finger to each of the glass-framed pictures of Sages and Saints, a thought arose in me, 'Why was he applying 'attar' on those pictures, as only living people use this?' The moment the thought arose in me, from a distance, still up on the ladder, Maharaj gave me a piercing look and asked, "Pictures? Are they only pictures? Look more closely!" When I looked at the thirty and odd framed pictures, lo, all of them became 'alive' as if truly animated! I was thrilled! Then, he climbed down, came and sat next to me and said: "One's '*bhava*' (inner attitude) of surrendered devotion, is most important while doing *puja* or witnessing a *puja*. If you see

God-forms as 'idols', they will certainly look like mere idols. If you treat them as 'pictures', they will only appear as pictures. Change the '*bhava*'. Wholeheartedly treat them as 'alive' and approach them with reverence.



".....he expounded Saint Jnaneswar's 'Jnaneshwari'....."

"Then, they will certainly turn 'alive' and shower their blessings on you. That is how Sages and Saints worship God, in the idols they have. However, always remain pivoted on the 'essence' - that the one who witnesses the *puja* or the one who performs the *puja* is the same Truth, since it is only God that resides in him or her. There exists no falsehood at all, for, everything including 'you' is the 'TRUTH'."

Maharaj then gave me a pat on my back, and added, "Has Sri Bhagavan not pointed out the spiritual truth that God resides in one's Heart, namely, the right side of the chest? Yes! He resides here!" Maharaj put his right hand on the right side of my chest. I felt totally elated. He further added: "From now on, put '*attar*' on your attire covering the right side of your chest!" I continue to apply perfume on my Heart, every day ! What an extraordinary blessing!

The eight days were thus successfully completed.

On 27th, I couldn't go as I was indisposed. On 28th & 29th I went at 10 a.m. and attended Maharaj's talks. Mrs and Mr. Sapre were there.

I was busy with Ashram work until February 8 evening. In the evening, along with P.V. Somasundaram, at the request of Maharaj, I attended the Marathi session of Maharaj where he expounded Saint Jnaneshwar's "Jnaneshwari". He performed a 'miracle'. There was quite a crowd of local people. He asked me to come and sit directly in front of him, at his feet. He was standing. He bent towards me and said, "Listen to every word I speak, attentively." He spoke in Marathi of which I don't know a word. For 45 minutes he spoke very fast, without a moment's pause, in Marathi unmixed with Hindi. When he completed, there was a thundering silence. Slowly he again bent down towards me and asked: "Did you understand?" 'Something' in me replied: "Yes, Maharaj! I understood every word you spoke!" I was surprised, for, though these words came out of my mouth, I felt I was only a 'listener' of those words and not the 'speaker' of those words. Maharaj laughed aloud and said, "Yes! It is for this that I made you come, this evening!" [That was the only evening session he permitted me to attend.] As I was leaving, he said with all affection, "Come and meet me tomorrow positively. I have *kaam* (business) to do with you!"

9-2-1979 (Diary Entry)

When I entered Maharaj's room it was 11.30 a.m. All eyes were on me; I was surprised. Mrs. Sapre slightly chided me, "Maharaj has been expecting you from 10 o'clock onwards. He was frequently casting his glance at the stairs." As I was about to sit, Maharaj swiftly directed Mrs. Sapre to make a pile of huge cushions and then guided me towards it and asked me to sit on it. A plate full of *puja* materials was handed over to Maharaj. He applied *tilak* on my forehead and perfume on my chest. He garlanded me. I was in a state of awe, wonder and suspense. A large plate containing a woolen shawl, terry-cotton shirt cloth, *dhoti* and an envelope containing Rs. 51/- was given to me and Maharaj requested me to accept them. Then, what Maharaj did took me unawares. He fully prostrated before me. He turned to the audience who were witnessing all that, with amazement [I learnt later Maharaj had never done such a thing ever before] and said, "This is how in *Bharat* [India] a *Jnani* greets another *Jnani*." I got up immediately and prostrated to Maharaj, tightly holding his feet. When I got up, he pleaded with me that as soon as I returned to the Ashram, I should start giving talks. I just kept quiet! (End of Diary Entry)

There were many occasions when Maharaj demonstrated to me his unique, natural, inborn genius. I want to mention one of them: After an inspiring talk by Maharaj, a middle aged affluent looking American went up to Maharaj and offered \$ 1000/- in cash as his

offering. Maharaj smiled but politely refused to accept it. The American pleaded, “Maharaj! Please accept it! For the wisdom I received from you today I can’t but pay my homage. I am a wealthy man and to me these are but peanuts. Kindly do not decline.”

Maharaj answered, “I know, I know! You Americans are very rich and very prosperous. I will tell you an ancient story. It is from the epic, *Ramayana*. Lord Rama’s wife Sita was abducted by the demon, Ravana. Rama sought the help of the monkey king,



Sri Rama blessing Hanuman

Sugriva. Their leader, Hanuman, guided the monkeys to recognize the greatness of Lord Rama. All of them pledged their support to Rama. In due course, Lord Rama vanquished Ravana and was triumphantly returning to his capital Ayodhya in India along with his rescued wife Sita. The monkeys also wanted to accompany them to Ayodhya as they were eager to witness the coronation ceremony of Lord Rama. When they reached Ayodhya, the monkeys as was their wont, made an enormous commotion. The coronation was

successfully conducted. The next day, early in the morning, Lord Rama asked Hanuman, “Why is there such silence and stillness? What happened to all your clan?” Hanuman replied, “My Lord! When they pledged support to you, they also took a severe vow that they would not eat or sleep until you are crowned as King of Ayodhya. Yesterday, they witnessed the coronation. Their vow completed, they ate to their hearts’ content. They felt so exhausted from lack of sleep that they are now fast asleep.” Lord Rama was very moved by the sacrifice the monkeys had made of giving up of their pleasures of food and sleep.

Maharaj suddenly stopped his narration and said, “Till now the original story. Now, I am going to add my own version.”

“So, Lord Rama gave a boon to all the monkeys: “All the monkeys deserve great pleasure and prosperity. So, may they all be reborn as ‘humans’ in America, where they will enjoy all this in plenty!”

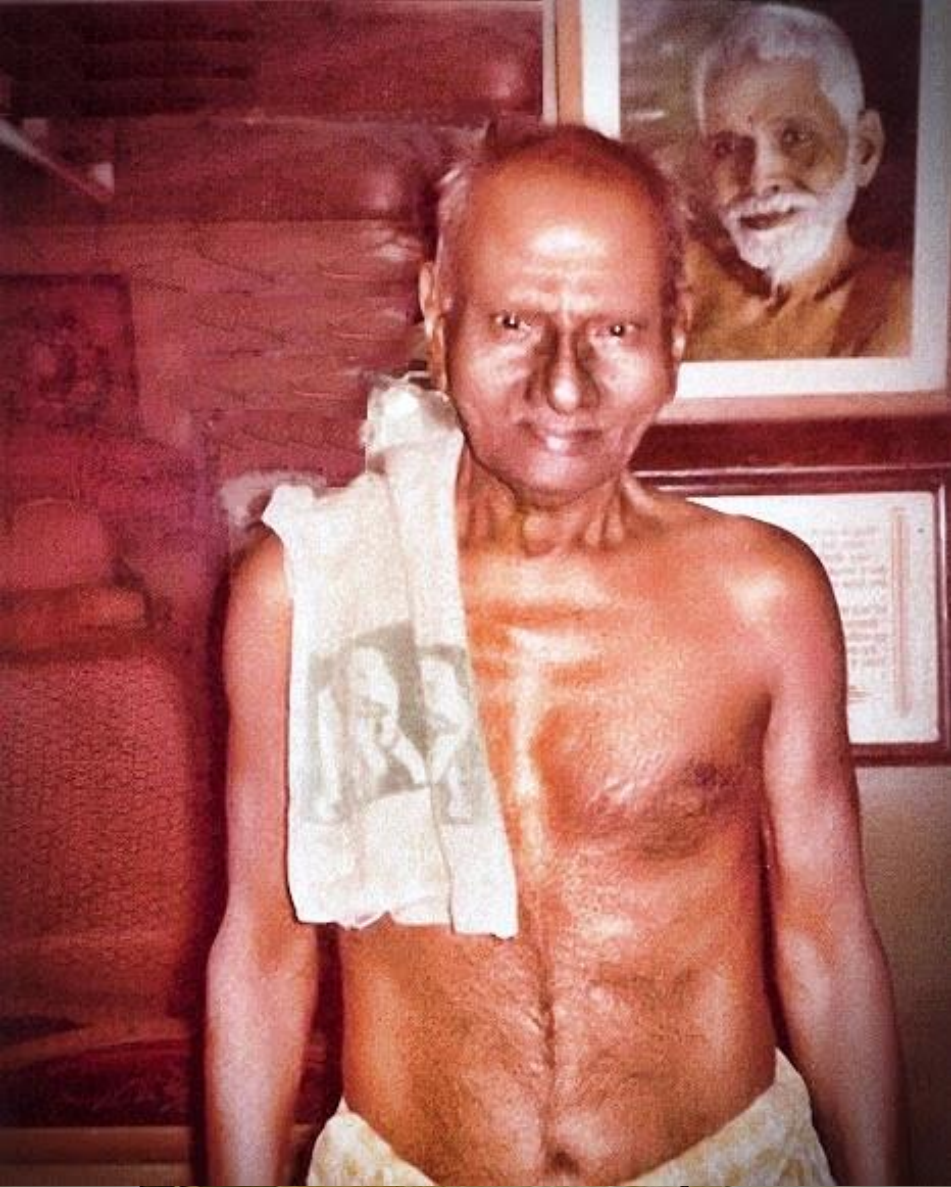
Maharaj turned to the American and the audience and added, “I know, you Americans revel in plenty and prosperity and are generous. You enjoy pleasures. Yet, I can’t accept your money. I am a *grihastha* [house-holder]. In our Hindu *dharma*, only *brahmacharis* [bachelors] and *sannyasis* [renunciates] are permitted to accept alms and donations. *Grihasthas* [active, house-holders] and *vanaprasthas* [retired, house-holders] are not permitted.”

Noticing the disappointment in the face of the American, Maharaj consolingly said, “You Americans will have material prosperity in great abundance in America, but if you want Lord Rama you will have to come to *Bharat* . You will have to come to India !”

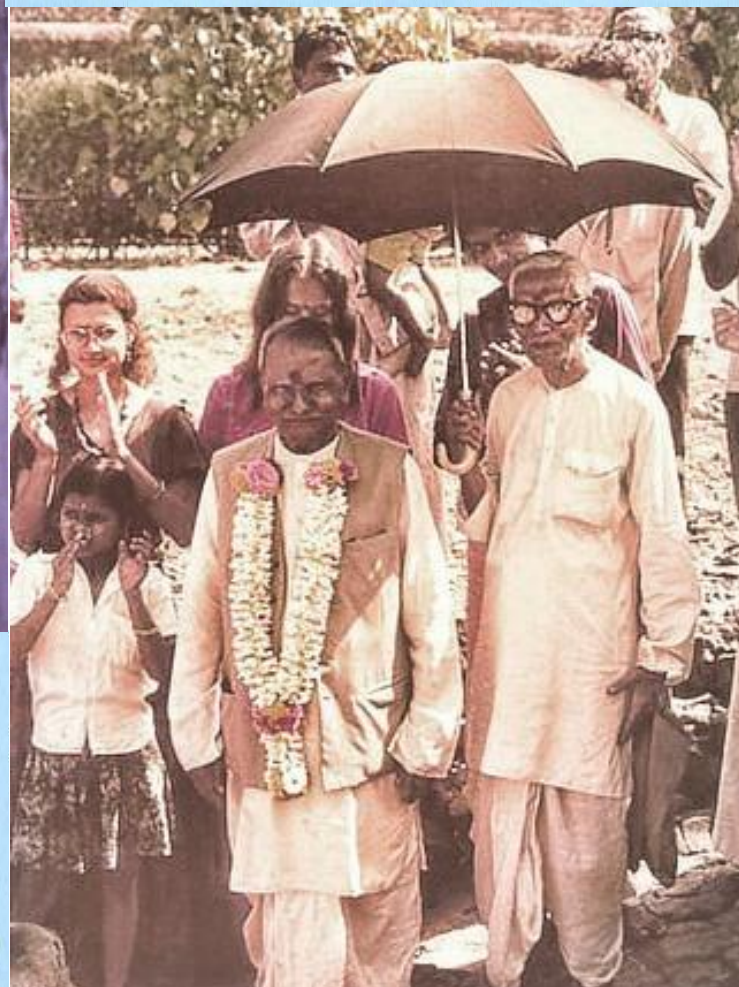
On another occasion, a remark which Maharaj made while I was with him had a deep, indelible impact on me: “**Pain is physical. Suffering is mental. Pain is unavoidable. Suffering is always avoidable.**”

There is an Internet version of the next story about a French lady called Edith Deri which is not quite accurate. What actually happened is as follows:

Edith Deri was an accountant in a reputed Bank in Paris. Every year she would spend all her earned holidays of the year at Sri Ramanasramam. She would land at Bombay, catch a flight to Madras, take a taxi and arrive at our Ashram without halting anywhere. Her dedication to Sri Bhagavan and His teaching was that deep. I became very fond of her and even addressed her as my ‘*French Mother*’! She too responded and addressed me as ‘Son’!



Maharaj with (l) Ramesh Balsekar and (r) Mullarpattan



Nisargadatta Maharaj with his son Chittaranjan (right end), daughter-in-law and grand children



When she read my encounters with Nisargadatta Maharaj in ***The Mountain Path***, she got very upset. On her next visit, she chided me for wasting time by going away from Arunachala to Bombay to be with another teacher. She asked me, “What is lacking in Sri Bhagavan’s teaching that you needed that teacher’s help?” She was a powerful personality. It was clear to me that no amount of my explaining matters to her verbally, would convince her. So I told her, “Mother! You have to be with Maharaj to know why I go there. On your next visit, stop for a day in Bombay, go to him and see for yourself!” She agreed.

The next year, during the milk offering at the Ashram early morning *puja*, I felt the warmth of an affectionate pat on my back. It was my French Mother! She looked overflowingly happy. She hurriedly drew me out and narrated the following, with great joy:

“As directed by you, my dear ‘Son’, I stopped for a day in Bombay and went to see Maharaj. I was simmering with anger. I wanted to take him to task for luring my ‘Son’ away from my Sri Bhagavan! I went to Maharaj’s house at ten. When I climbed up the stairs, there was a large crowd already gathered in front of Maharaj. So, I sat on the last step itself. Maharaj welcomed me with a smile and a nod of his head. This infuriated me further. I controlled myself and kept quiet. Maharaj told me, “Ask some question.” I didn’t respond. He insisted a few times that I ask him something. I became restless and angrily blurted out, “I have nothing to ask of you. There is no doubt in me.” Maharaj still persisted with his demand. I became really angry and said, “Why are you insisting on my asking you a question? Is it to show off your greatness to your audience? That is, I should ask a question and you will answer it and smash my doubting mind, right? And the entire audience will applaud you, right? Is that not the reason you go on insisting that I should put a question to you?” I was certainly rude but I could not hide my irritation. I had to take it out on him.

“Maharaj was all the time graciously directing his look on me, with a beatific smile on his face. He was untouched by my expression of anger and intolerance. After a few minutes of concentrated look at me, he opened his mouth and words rolled down like a waterfall:

“Water is never bothered whether the thirst of the man is quenched or not!” Maharaj repeated it slowly but with emphasis a couple of times: “Water is never bothered whether the thirst of the man is quenched or not!” Something wonderful took place in me! All my anger, frustration and irritation vanished and in their place a sea of peace, silence and bliss surged up. This experience helped me transcend my mind’s limitations; and, I became immensely happy. I am very happy I met him. Thank you, my ‘Son’! Maharaj is truly a great Saint!”

Many were puzzled why Maharaj insisted on asking newcomers to put questions to him, even before they got acquainted with his mode of teaching. This approach was unique to Maharaj.

One day, he turned to me and said, “What a *sadhaka* (seeker) knows consciously about himself is only one-ninth of his being. The rest is buried as the ‘unconscious’, like an iceberg! He has no means to unknot this huge quota of his ‘unconscious’. With a single glance, a Saint can unravel a seeker’s entire ‘unconscious’, layer by layer. We want to work on it, tackle it and destroy it. To do that, we need the ‘password’ from the seeker, the approval of the seeker. Each Saint has a unique method of raising this hidden ‘unconscious’ of the seeker to the surface so that he can catch it and work on it. We are only interested in the hidden part of the seeker’s ‘unconscious’. As a matter of fact, we also deal with the one-ninth of his conscious level, as well. Ramana Maharshi used ***“Who am I?”*** Swami Ramdas used ***“Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram”***. Shirdi Sai Baba used ***“Allah Malik”***. I insist on the newcomer putting me a question. This is my method. I answer the question but it is only of secondary importance. When the seeker spells out his doubt, his ‘unconscious’ raises itself without his knowledge to the surface through his words. I catch it immediately and start working on it! This is a mystery which no ordinary mind can understand. What is great about dispelling the doubts coming from the one-ninth conscious level, the tip of the iceberg? There are plenty of books which can do that. But then, what about the hidden unconscious?

“After all, a seeker goes to a Saint to be freed from his deeply hidden problems. He can do nothing about it by himself as he is totally unaware of its depth and magnitude. The Saint’s attention on the seeker is the operation of Grace! Saints are thus the most compassionate. Whether the seekers recognize it or not, we are not bothered. So, when I repeatedly insist that the newcomer put me a question, I do it out of tremendous compassion surging from within me towards the struggling seeker. I use the question as the key to unlock his ‘unconscious’ and clean it up.”

Maharaj’s words solved a puzzle which was in my mind ever since I saw him insisting that I and other new visitors, ask him some question. It is obvious that the powerful words that he repeated to Edith Deri had a purging effect on her unconscious, as well.

Another American devotee, on his first visit, was asked by Maharaj to put him a question. Like all fresh visitors, he too pleaded, “You are the repository of Wisdom, Maharaj ! We come here only to listen to your words of Wisdom...I do not have questions !” Looking at him with all compassion and love, Maharaj thundered at him, “What were you, before the ‘Sun’ rose ?” There prevailed total silence, in the hall. A remarkable change

came over the American devotee. With all joy and contentment, he prostrated to Maharaj; and, remained in joy-filled Silence, during the whole session ! When we came out of Maharaj's house, I asked him, "What happened ? You seem now to be a thoroughly changed, immensely happy person !" "Oh ! It is a wonderful inner experience, my friend ! From childhood, I have never woken up before 'Sun' rise. I have never seen the 'Sun' rise ! By putting that question, perhaps, Maharaj pushed me to my inner latent state of 'deep sleep', even while I was fully and totally 'awake' ! I experienced for the first time in my life, the true state of 'Inner Silence', with conscious and total Awareness !"

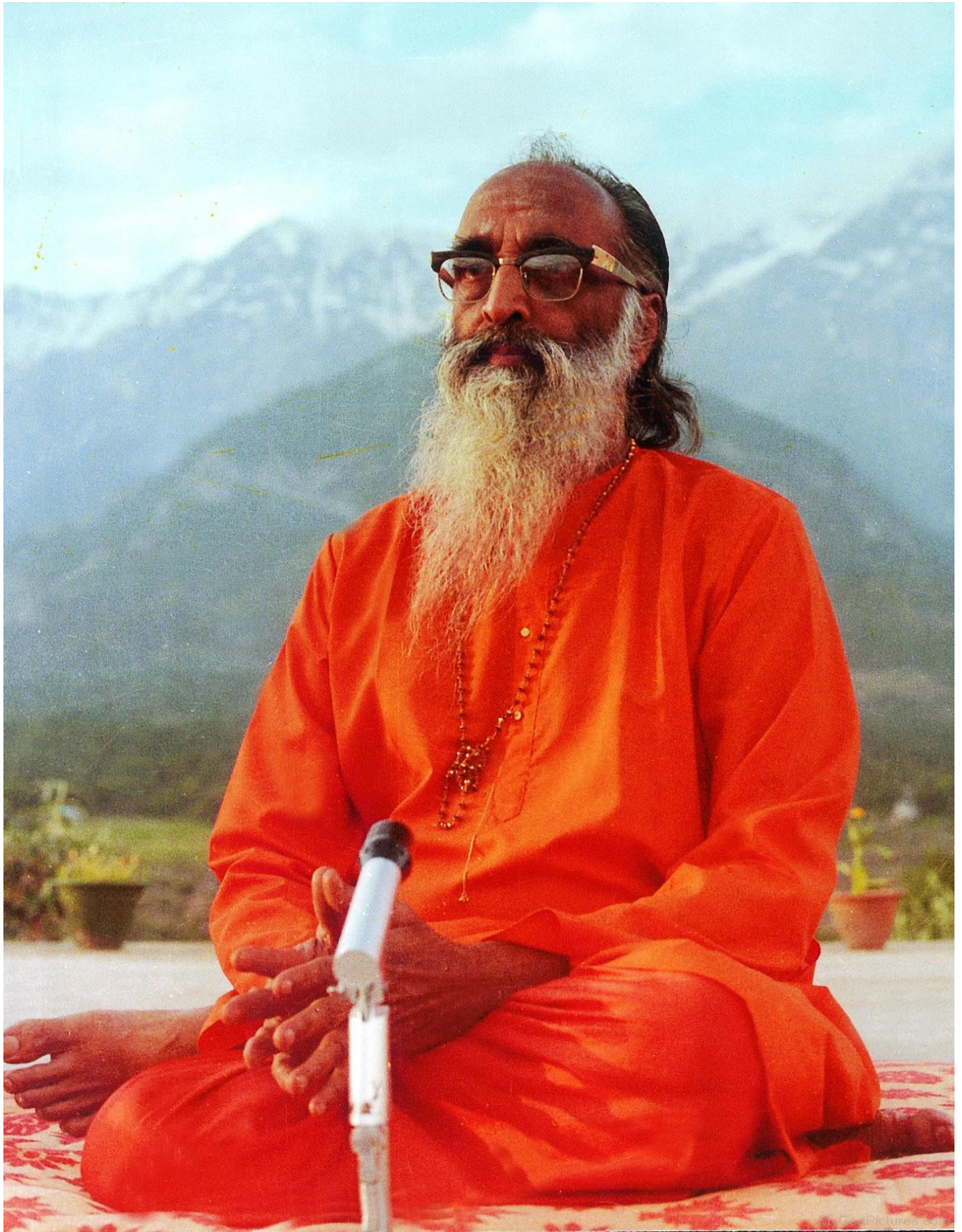
In his last days, Maharaj was affected with throat cancer and was advised by Doctors not to make bodily movements. Hence, visitors were requested not to bring him garlands or gifts, to receive which Maharaj had to rise up from his bed, causing him enormous pain. I did not know about it. That day, I brought flower garlands and fruits, as my offering to Maharaj. When I entered the room, all the eyes were piercing me like daggers. From the corner of his eyes, Maharaj should have seen me. He made herculean efforts to get up from his bed to receive the fruits. Maharaj's body got so emaciated, it looked like a skeleton ! Seeing his condition, I could not control my emotions; I cried profusely, sobbing.

Maharaj bid me to put the garland around his neck and extended his hands to receive the fruits. Seeing my state of shattered condition, he smiled and said : "Is this all you have learnt from the Maharshi's teachings ? Is this all you have learnt after listening to me, for so many years ? Am I the 'body' ?" With tender affection, Maharaj patted my back. With immense emotion, still shedding copious tears, I replied, "Maharaj ! I know, you are not the body. I also know, I am not the body. But, yet, Maharaj ! This body has moved with deepest love, affection, veneration and surrendered dedication with your body. Uncontrollably, I am affected to see the emaciated condition of your body..." I was struggling to continue.

Maharaj gave me an embrace of blessing and firmly said : "**Guru** alone lives, you do not. Hold on to the **Guru**. His Presence is always in your Heart. Bhagavan Ramana is blessing you, all the time ! Be aware ! Be alert ! Never allow unconsciousness to supervene. I bless you ! You are ever the '**Truth**' ! "

Saints are nothing but the conglomeration of Compassion, Love, Grace and Blessings -- crystallized in a human form!

JAI SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ KI JAI !



SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA



Life

Balakrishna Menon, the future '**Swami Chinmayananda**' was born on May 8, 1916 in Kerala in the noble aristocratic family that strictly followed the ancient traditions. Balan, as he was fondly called, spent his early childhood receiving a lot of love and attention amongst a large extended family of cousins, uncles and aunts. Saints and Sages often visited the house; they too paid special attention on Balan, predicting that he will have a great future. He grew up as a charming and mischievous boy adored by all. Brilliant and intelligent as a student he loved reading, swimming and badminton. He was very good at mimicking everyone with great wit and humor. Balan attended English Modern School where he also learned Malayalam and Sanskrit.

The whole family had a tradition of gathering together for daily *sat sangh* and evening *puja*. Swamiji used to recall, "As I was sitting there in the *puja* room waiting for the *arathi* which meant the end of *sat sangh*, I used to gaze at the pictures of Gods right in front of me. The one I liked the most was Lord Shiva. To pass time I developed my own private game. I used to look at Lord Shiva with Ganga flowing out from his matted hair, with the serpent for a head-band and the crescent moon lighting his smiling compassionate eyes. Then, I would shut my eyes to see whether I could see Him in my own mind, then open the eyes again and compare the picture. I would do that again and again, until I got it right to the smallest detail."

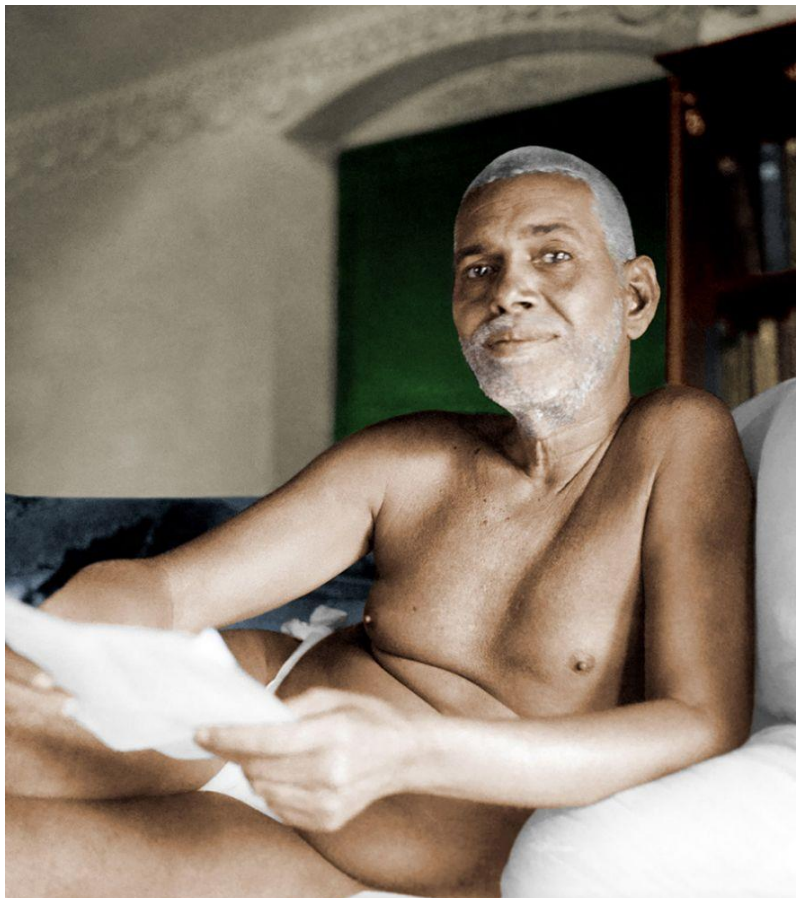
In 1940, young Balan joined the Lucknow University where he studied English literature and law. He was very active in the campus -- appeared in several dramas in the theater, became a member of the literary club, the debating club, and was on the University tennis team. But it wasn't all that he did. Sensitive to the life around him, in 1942 Balan joined the Indian Independence movement. He was involved in writing and distributing

leaflets against the British government, organizing public strikes and giving speeches. His rare leadership qualities made him visible in the movement and he was soon caught and put in prison, wherein he spent several months, under terrible conditions.

In prison, he had plenty of time to reflect on his own life, as well as on 'life' in general. He had seen lifeless bodies being carried out daily - the reality of death could not be ignored. Questions such as: "What is the meaning of this life? Is there something more permanent and if so what is it?" occupied his mind. Weakened by stay for months in the jail he fell ill with typhus fever. There was little hope for his recovery. Consequently, he was carried out into the night and tossed on the side of the road on the outskirts of the city.

Swamiji reports about the event, saying, "Luckily for me, a kindly Christian-Indian lady took me into her home and cared for me like a son. Later she told me that my nose reminded her of her son who was with the army. It could be said that I was 'saved by the nose'."

As soon as Balan regained his health, he went on to graduate in Law and English literature. In 1945 he moved to Delhi, and joined the editorial staff of '*The National Herald*', the then very popular national newspaper. His innate compassion for man was evident through all his writings.

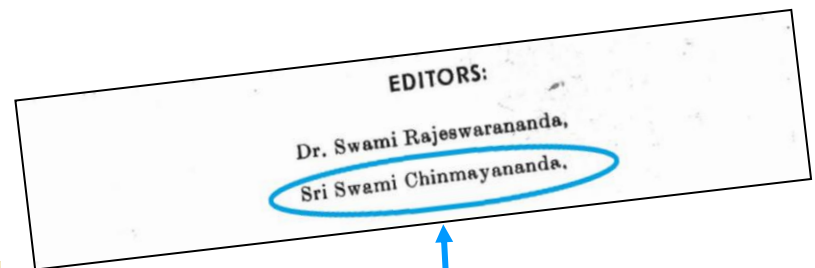
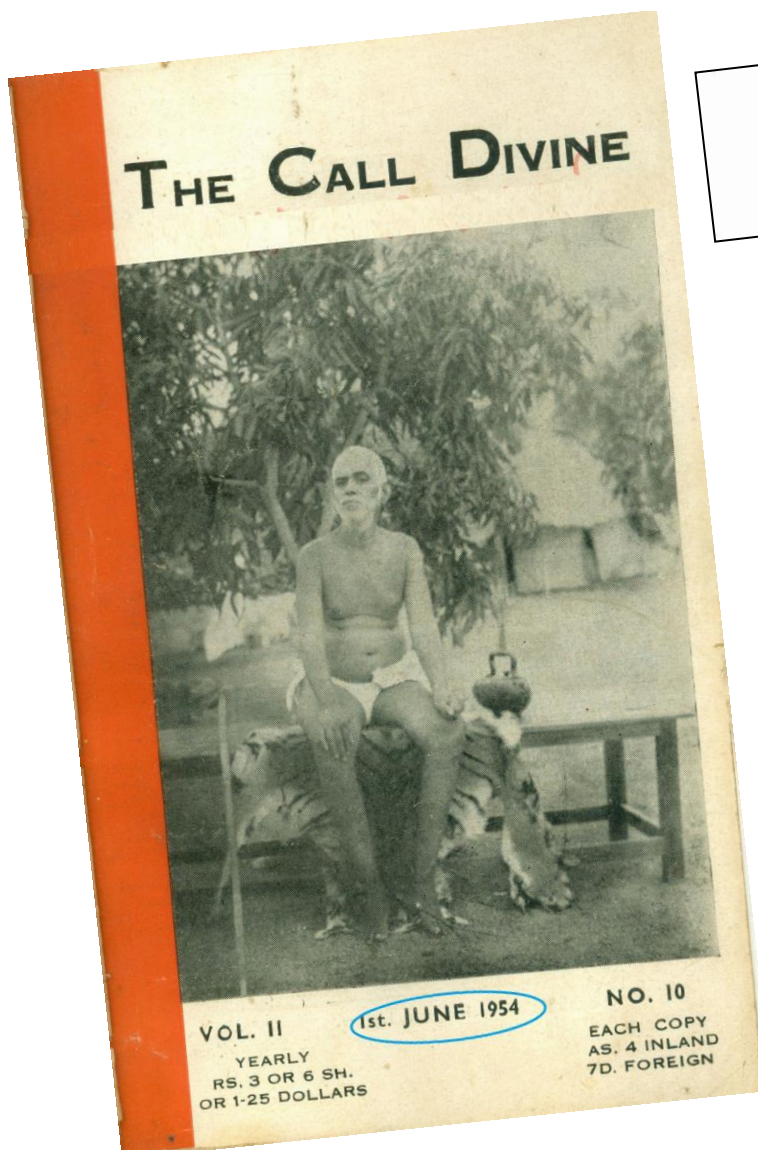


Sri Bhagavan in the Old Hall

But, Balan soon discovered the emptiness of the so called "good life". Underneath the noisy parties, the expensive clothes and jewellery, and empty talks he sensed dissatisfaction, agitation and often despair. The old memories of his childhood - the joy of falling asleep with a *mantra* on his lips and the loving, reassuring picture of Lord Shiva, in the *puja* room – all came back, flooding his mind.

He started chanting the *mantra* : 'Om Nama Shivaya', every night before going to sleep.

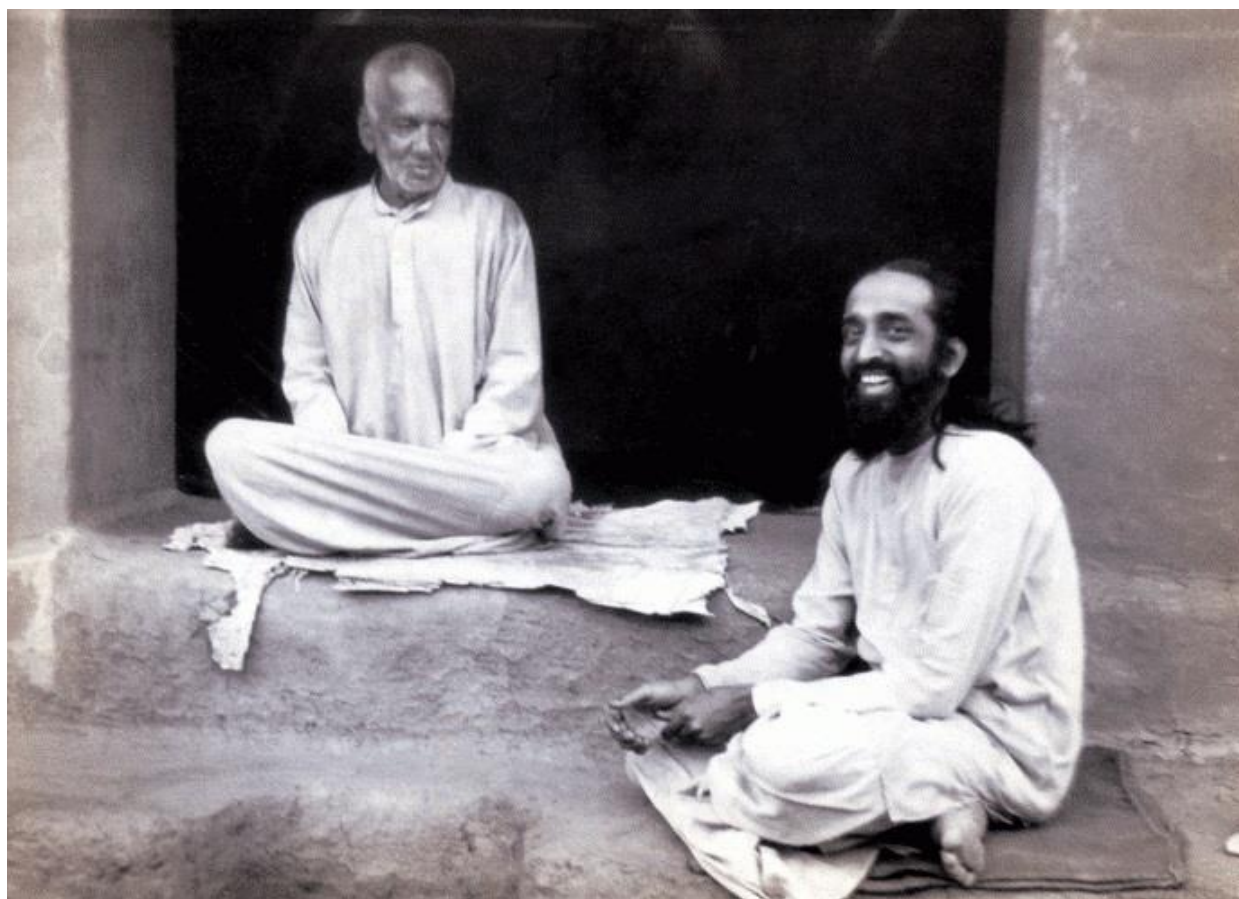
It was at this crucial period that he came across the books of Swami Sivananda, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ram Tirtha, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi; and, began reading them all, studiously. The writings of Swami Sivananda, who stressed, "Be good. Do good. Serve, love, purify, meditate, realize, and be free", had the most profound influence on Balan. But, doubts still lingered in the mind of the self-acclaimed agnostic. Determined to find answers to them, the radical young journalist landed at the Himalayan Ashram of Swami Sivananda in 1947.



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However, the very first meeting with Swami Sivananda blew away Balan's preconceived ideas about spirituality. The Master's dignity, his brilliant intelligence, the special aura of divinity captured him. Further more, the Ashram was not at all what he expected. It was a dynamic place where numerous spiritual and social projects were continuously going on, and yet in the midst of all, there prevailed peace and tranquillity. Swami Sivananda, who recognized Balan's great spiritual potential, paid him special attention and teased him, "God gave you such an intelligence! Why don't you use it for Him?! You can join us and become a Swami! "

On the 25th of February 1949, on the auspicious day of *Maha Shivaratri*, Swami Sivananda initiated Balan to the order of *sannyas* and gave him the name "**Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati**", which meant "the one who revels in the Bliss of Pure Consciousness". Swamiji studied and worked in the Ashram for some time. Swami Sivananda observed that the young Swami was drawn deeply only to *Jnana Marga* and hence, guided him to Uttarkashi to study under the renowned *Vedantic* Master, Swami Tapovan Maharaj.



Swami Tapovan and Swami Chinmayananda

Swamiji spent eight years studying the scriptures at the feet of Swami Tapovan. It was not easy, for Swami Tapovan was a great disciplinarian and a very demanding teacher. He never repeated his lesson twice. During this period, Swamiji lived in the cowshed with a stone for a pillow. However, Chinmayananda was an *uttama adhikari* (the best student) - his burning inner urge for Self-Knowledge knew no obstacles. He was often seen sitting all night in meditation in a quiet forest or on the banks of the Ganges.

After finishing study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras*, Swamiji prayed to his *Guru*, "I feel an immense urge to go down to the plains and share the wealth of the holy scriptures with my fellow countrymen. I want to run down like the Ganga which nourishes and inspires with its refreshing water."

Swami Tapovan did not share the enthusiasm of his disciple. "People are not yet ready, they will not understand you. Instead, take a trip down to plains wandering around as a renunciate, living as a beggar among those you once knew".

Swamiji did as instructed and in November, 1951, he returned to Tapovan Kutir in Uttarkashi after a complete tour of India. But he came back even more convinced that his mission in life was to take *Vedanta* to every nook and corner of Mother India. Once again he pleaded with Swami Tapovan for permission. This time, Swami Tapovan acceded, "All right, go and start your *Jnana Yagna* but on one condition - you must have at least four people in the audience, including the speaker." Truly enough the first *Jnana Yagna* started in Pune with exactly four people !



".....Ganga flowing near Uttarkashi...."

Thus, Swami Chinmayananda came down from the Himalayas bringing with him the Wisdom of the *Vedic Rishis* and with it the revival of moral and spiritual values in the whole nation. His primary aim was, "***To convert Hindus to Hinduism!***"

Is it not a historical fact that for four centuries, India -- in particular Hindu tradition and culture -- was oppressed (and was almost at the verge of being ruined) by waves of foreign invasions – Mongol, Mughal, Muslim – culminating with the British culture and the Christian institutional domination ? It was Swami Chinmayananda who plunged himself – almost all alone – in reviving the Hindu culture back to its hoary heights ! One wandering Hindu monk at Varanasi said that what tens of stalwart Hindu religious leaders could not achieve jointly, Swamiji fulfilled triumphantly, single-handedly ! It is true, indeed !

The young radical Swami was taking the secret Knowledge of the *Vedas* to the streets by holding public lectures in English - the language of the foreigners!

Swamiji traveled through the country urging that all national activities should be organized around higher spiritual ideals, proving that spirituality is not a hindrance to progress, but enriches life and gives it a new meaning.

Swamiji worked tirelessly for 42 years in spite of his ill health. He used to say: "***When I rest, I rust***". His joyous presence brought inspiration and strength. He was ever punctual, never complaining, full of enthusiasm, ready to help and guide, never missed an appointment, even when sick. He taught the importance of spiritual knowledge in every day life. His style of presentation was novel and fresh - shockingly irresistible. He explained the philosophy of ancient scriptures with the logic of science and with the dynamism and humor that resonated with the modern youth. His charming smile cheered hearts, and the magnet of his clear strong voice soon started drawing earnest seekers after Truth, in the thousands.

Once a child asked, "Swamiji where do you live?" Swamiji answered: "At airports and train stations". And it was true! This great Saint did not have a home of his own. As a matter of fact he owned nothing. Up to the end of his life he never stayed in one place for more than a week. He used to say: "***Vedanta makes you a better Hindu, a better Christian, a better Muslim as it makes you a better human being.***"

Apart from lecturing, Swami Chinmayananda wrote commentaries to major *Vedantic* texts, as well. His books dealt with different aspects of true religion and included books for children.

As early as in the sixties, the Chinmaya Mission had reached every corner of India.

Then, Swamiji took the principles of *Vedanta* to the world. He started lecturing abroad, year after year. The Mission centers grew in numbers across the Globe. The Mission's motto was simple yet profound : "Give maximum happiness to the maximum of people for the maximum of time."

Chinmaya Mission has the unique credit of including in its study curriculum – in all their branches – the core teachings of Bhagavan Ramana, in Sanskrit verses, as one of their main text books : Sri Bhagavan's "Upadesa Saram" = "Essence of Instructions in Thirty Verses" and Sri Bhagavan's "Sat Darshanam" = "Forty Verses on Reality". Swamiji has truly thus honoured the "greatest *Advaitin* ever born on earth", as he used to proudly adore Bhagavan Ramana !

Swamiji gave special attention and affection to children, for he saw them as the builders of the future. For them he organized the "*Bala Vihar*" and "*Yuva Kendra*" classes. These helped the youngsters to unfold their hidden potential in the light of dynamic spirituality. To see them prosper, Swamiji used to remark, was the best *Guru dakshina* he ever received.

Chinmaya Mission sponsors 62 schools in India where apart from the normal school curriculum children learn the *Vedic* heritage. There are also nursing and management schools to provide higher education. Swamiji also started Ashrams in India and America where new teachers, *brahmacharis* and *Swamis* of the Mission were trained according to the ancient *gurukul* tradition. The main Ashrams in India are in Bombay, and in Himalayas at Siddhabari. In America Ashrams are in Piercy, San Jose, Washington, Chicago, Flint, New York state, and Florida. In his great compassion Swamiji also set up free clinics, hospitals, vocational schools, orphanages, and a home for senior citizens.

In 1992, Swami Chinmayananda gave an address in the United Nations titled "Planet in Crisis". Just before his *Mahasamadhi*, Swamiji was recognized as a World renowned teacher of *Vedanta* and a Hindu religious leader. He was selected as President of Hindu Religion for the Centennial Conference of the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, where Swami Vivekananda had given his address, over a hundred years ago.

Swami Chinmayananda had chronic heart problems. He had his first heart attack in 1969, when his treatment at the newly opened Chinmaya Mission Hospital in Bangalore made him its first patient. In the summer of 1980, when he was in the United States conducting a series of *Jnana Yajnas*, he had to undergo a multiple heart bypass surgery in Texas. On 29 July, 1993, he had emergency heart bypass surgery. His condition continued to be critical and he was put on a life-support system.

He dropped his body on 3rd August, 1993, in U.S.A.; and, his body was flown to India, taken to Siddhabari and interred there. His *Samadhi* shrine at Siddhabari has become a place of sanctuary for his arduous followers and other pilgrims, as well.



Swamiji with Bhagavan Sri Ramana

It was in the summer of 1936, during his school holidays, that the future Swamiji had his first *darshan* of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. About this great event in his life, Swamiji said: “I was just emerging from high school, exams were over. On a package railway ticket I was roaming through South India. As the train chugged through the countryside at a halting speed, most of the passengers in my compartment suddenly peered through the windows in great excitement and bowed reverently to an elaborate temple beyond. Inquiring about it, I was told that it was Sri Arunachaleswar Temple.

“Thereafter, the talk of my fellow travellers turned to Sri Ramana Maharshi. The word ‘*Maharshi*’ conjured up in my mind ancient forest retreats and superhuman beings of divine glow. Though I was at that time a convinced atheist, I was deeply drawn to visit the Maharshi’s Ashram. I chose to take the next available train to Tiruvannamalai.

At the Ashram I was told that the Maharshi was in the Hall and anybody was free to walk in and see him. As I entered, I saw on the couch an elderly man, wearing but a loincloth, reclining against a round bolster. I sat down at the very foot of the couch. The Maharshi suddenly opened his eyes and looked straight into mine: I looked into his. A mere look, that was all. I felt that the Maharshi was, in that split moment, looking deep into me – and I was sure that he saw all my shallowness, confusions, faithlessness, imperfections, and fears. I cannot explain what happened in that one split moment. I felt opened, cleaned, healed, and emptied! A whirl of confusions: my atheism dropping away, but skepticism flooding into question, wonder, and search. My reason gave me strength and I said to myself, ‘It is all mesmerism, my own foolishness.’ Thus assuring myself, I got up and

walked away. But the boy who left the hall was not the boy who had gone in some ten minutes before. It was only many years later, when I started reading spiritual books seriously, before my *sannyasa diksha*, that I realised how blessed I had been by the *kataaksha* ('Glance of Grace') of a great *Jnani*. After my college days, my political work, and after my years of stay in Uttarkashi at the feet of my Master, Swami Tapovan, I knew that what I gained on the banks of the Ganges was that which had been given to me years before by the Sage of Arunachala on that hot summer day – by a mere look."

Govindaraju, a devout devotee spent his last days at Arunachala. He was one of Swamiji's close devotees as well ! He narrated two incidents from Swamiji's life :

- One of Swamiji's affluent devotees invited Swamiji home for giving him *bhiksha* (food-offering). That devotee was passionately praising Swamiji's service to humanity. He started saying "Swamiji ! Saints like you and Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi ...". Swamiji thundered : "**STOP** ! Do not compare missionaries with Generators. Sages like Bhagavan Sri Ramana are Generators. We are only distributors."

- When Swamiji, as a young *sannyasi* came to Sri Bhagavan, he wanted to have a private session alone with the Maharshi.

The moment that thought arose in him, the few devotees who were sitting in the Hall left. Thus, Swamiji was left alone with Sri Bhagavan. He asked : "Bhagavan ! I wish to ask you..." Before Swamiji could complete the sentence, Sri Bhagavan said : "Let everyone go".

Thinking that Sri Bhagavan was not aware that everyone had already left the Hall, Swamiji said : "**All have left. I am alone...**". Sri Bhagavan gave him a piercing look and said : "**Let that also go**".

Those words of Sri Bhagavan created an explosion in Swamiji's awareness.



Sayings of Swami Chinmayananda

“The highest form of Grace is Silence.”

“Introspect daily, detect diligently, negate ruthlessly.”

“Every body dies. Nobody dies.”

“Comfort comes as guest. Lingers to become host and stays to enslave us.”

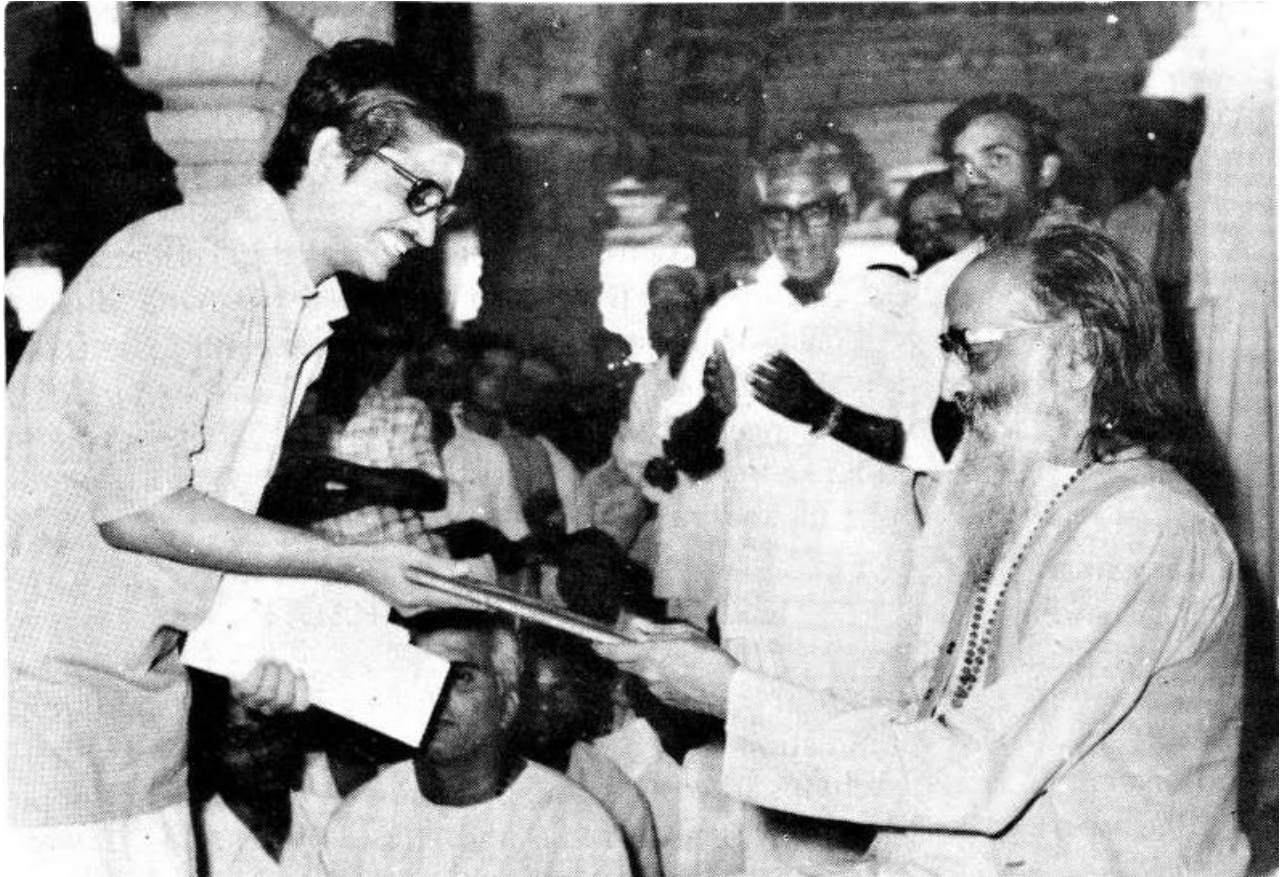
“He who submits to a discipline is a ‘disciple’.”

“Without devotion, knowledge is tasteless. Without knowledge, devotion is mere empty idol worship.”

“To remember the ever present Divine at all times, even while acting in the world, is the most positive practice for a seeker who is striving to evolve. He will thereby transform his inner personality from its present condition, to a state of harmony and efficiency.”

“Out of purity and silence come words of power.”

“*Bhakti* is the attitude of the ‘mind’. *Jnana* is the flow from the ‘Heart’. Both take one towards the Lord.”



Sri Bhagavan's Birth Centenary celebrations at Tiruvanaikovil : "Sri Ramana is an experience" - Swami Chinmayananda. V.Ganesan who presided over the function presented Ashram Publications to Swamiji (on Dec 20, 1982)

SWAMIJI AND ME

The period was 1956-1958. I was staying at the Ashram, serving it and simultaneously seeking a job outside for earning my livelihood. Major Chadwick was in charge of raising funds for building Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi* Shrine. He told me that the inflow of donations was very scarce, in spite of his sending appeal after appeal to the devotees to send their donations, generously. He needed Rs.10,000 urgently to speed up the stone work on the construction of the temple over Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi*. As the amount was not forthcoming, he felt extremely upset and expressed his disappointment that though Sri Bhagavan was the greatest Sage born on earth, a simple monument for Him could not be raised in time. On the day that he told me this, I read in the newspaper about an 'unknown' young Swami in Pune, to whom devotees had offered Rs.100,000 as *pada puja* for giving him one *biksha* (lunch) in their home! This apparent contradiction disturbed me deeply - Rs.10,000 could not be collected for Sri Bhagavan's Shrine while ten times that amount was offered to a young Swami for a mere visit to a house ! I showed it to Major Chadwick and expressed my anguish. In reply, he just gave a wry smile and brushed the whole thing aside! That young 'unknown' Swami in Pune, I came to know later was Swami Chinmayananda!

After that, I saw this name 'Swami Chinmayananda' in the editorial page of a monthly, *The Call Divine*, dedicated to Sri Bhagavan and published from Bombay. He was listed as its co-editor along with its editor, the reputed Swami Rajeswarananda. This too surprised me!

However, a significant event took place which made me very close to Swami Chinmayananda: My father, the Ashram President, was away on a tour and I was in charge of the administration of the Ashram. One day, I was contacted by a few V.I.Ps from Bangalore. They requested that the Ashram host a large entourage, led by a Swami for one whole day, which meant also providing them with lunch, afternoon tea, snacks and dinner at night. They informed me that they would leave the Ashram only late in the evening and that they would bear all the expenses incurred. The Ashram was in a very poor condition with regard to its resources and finance. There were not enough kitchen staff to cater to so many guests and it looked an impossible task for me and for the few who worked in the Ashram office. Yet, my teacher *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, who was devoted to Sages, Saints, Swamijis and *Sadhus* encouraged me to accept it by saying that he would help and guide me. I agreed. TKS reminded me of my school classmate Ramamurthy who then owned Park Hotel, the one and only hotel in the town, at that time. He said he would go and arrange for everything. My teacher was a colossus, a 'Mount Everest', in every which way, plus a true confidant, friend, philosopher and guide!

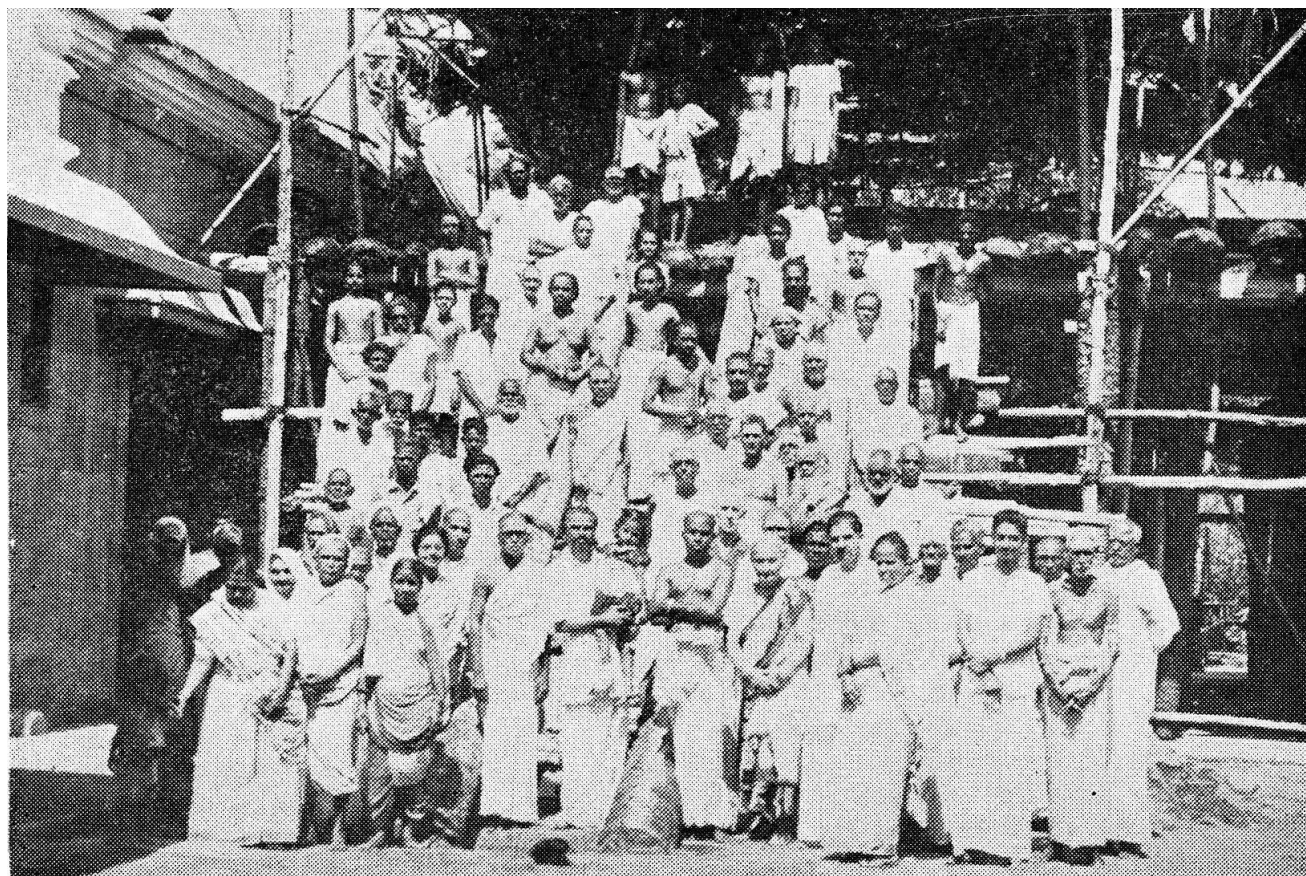
A few days later, a large group of officers from reputed factories in Bangalore arrived at the Ashram with their Managing Directors and General Managers, in seven large luxury buses. Who should step out first from a posh car that led the convoy? Swami Chinmayananda! He was all smiles and appreciated my taking the responsibility of looking after such a large entourage. The whole retreat took place in front of Cow Lakshmi's *Samadhi*. Swamiji enthralled all with his brilliant speeches on *Bhagavad Gita*, almost throughout the day. My friend Ramamurthy himself supervised the catering of the food on time to the over three hundred VIP guests. Finally, he packed their dinner, in neat, individual packets, which helped them leave early in the evening back to Bangalore. Everyone looked truly very happy!

Before leaving, Swami Chinmayananda took me aside and spoke to me, "One day, during a talk, I was suddenly confronted by an important officer from a big organization. He wanted to understand what exactly renunciation was and how it would feel if one renounced all. I thought to myself, 'Why only explain it to him alone, when I can give the taste of it to all the 300 odd devotees assembled there?' So, I told the audience that I would give all of them the taste of renunciation, provided they all were prepared to surrender to me one whole day by following me wherever I go without question – no planning, no thinking about anything, except obeying the Teacher. They agreed. Sri Bhagavan guided me to bring them

here and give them the true taste of renunciation. Is there anyone greater than Sri Bhagavan in having totally renounced everything! I prayed to Sri Bhagavan to bless every one of them. And so, here I am, Ganesa! I am happy you willingly helped me give them a true taste of renunciation! See! The true taste of renunciation is nothing but pure 'happiness' ! If I had only told them so in words, would they have understood? Thank you, Ganesa! ”

As reported in my account on Mother Rama Devi, I took up a job as a sub-editor in the English newspaper “*Indian Express*” at Chittoor. One day, a posh car came, picked me up and took me to the house of the wealthiest person in that town, V. Dwaraknath Reddy. I was taken aback by utter surprise! It was a grand lunch session given in honour of Swami Chinmayananda. There was a long table around which some very important dignitaries were sitting. At the head of the table sat Swamiji. He directed Dwaraknath to make me sit next to him. During lunch, Swamiji was, as always, in a jubilant mood and was making everyone burst into laughter with his stories. In between, he repeatedly turned to me and urged me to have more food, especially the special mango milk shake, as the fruits were plucked from the house garden of Reddy.

After lunch, there was a lively yet relaxed session in the living room. Here too, he made me sit next to him. In all seriousness, Swamiji told me, “You know, Ganesa! You and



Devotees bestowing keen interest in completing Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine

I belong to the same caste! You know that?" I was puzzled. But even before I could recover from my bewilderment, Swamiji roared, "We both belong to the 'editor caste' ! Years ago, I was a sub-editor in the '*Free Press Journal*' in Bombay, now, you are a sub-editor, in the '*Indian Express*', here!"

Three very wealthy industrialists approached Swamiji and spoke to him: "Swamiji! We are planning to start a new factory. Should we start it or not? If you categorically confirm that we should, we will give you Rs.200,000 if that factory is successful. That is our part of the deal. Your part is that you should own the responsibility of saying, 'Yes, start it' and face the consequences if it fails." Putting his fingers to his chin, Swamiji pretended to be pensively thinking about it. He then replied, "You are truly very fair. I also would be equally fair. So, you give me an advance of Rs.100, 000 now, right now. And, I will assure you that the new factory you start will be a tremendous success! You need not pay the balance before the factory runs successfully!" The industrialists were extremely happy over Swamiji's fairness in arriving at this deal. After paying him Rs.100,000, they left.

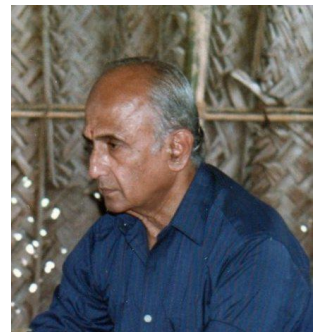
After they left, Swamiji turned to me and said, "Look! I have gained this much money today. I need it for some ongoing construction work. The success of the factory depends on the Grace of God and on their own hard work. Am I a soothsayer to give predictions? Yet, people do need encouragement. I give them this - not unconditionally, but only with conditions that brings me also gain !" Swamiji then burst out into peels of laughter, in which all of us joined ! Later, Swamiji saw to it that I was dropped in the same posh car back to my drudgery office !

It was some time in March 1965. In those days, Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi* shrine was a thatched shed and there was a large open space in front of it. Every night, I slept in that open space, on a mat without a pillow or bed-sheet. I used to get up at 3.30 in the morning, sweep clean the precincts around Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi* and then do the same inside Sri Bhagavan's Old Hall. Only then would I attend to my morning ablutions. One day, just before dawn, I saw two people were silently and reverently walking around Sri Bhagavan's shrine. On approaching closer, I recognized them – they were Swami Chinmayananda and B.V. Reddy (uncle of Dwaraknath Reddy). From the Old Hall, I ran towards them and prostrated to Swamiji. He raised me up and patted me on my back and said, joyously, "Oho! Oho! Ganesa has caught us! Reddy and I wanted to come *incognito*, pay our homages to Sri Bhagavan and leave for U.S.A. Reddy had planned to take me directly from Bangalore to the Madras airport. But, I insisted that we take a detour, go to Arunachala and take the blessings of Sri Bhagavan before I take up this new venture of travelling abroad. Sri Bhagavan has fully blessed me, Ganesa! I am happy I met you, as well! Stay here and serve Sri Bhagavan! All will be well with you! Now, give me your good wishes and allow us

to leave for the airport, direct from Sri Bhagavan's Shrine of Grace!" I again prostrated to Swamiji - on that day he had revealed to me how fully surrendered Swamiji was to *Satguru Ramana* !

That was the time, when after my short stint of three months at the newspaper office in Chittoor, I started living at the Ashram. I started working hard to help complete the temple over the sacred shrine of Sri Bhagavan. Observing me, the seventeen members committee came to me one day and said they had decided to appoint me to collect the required funds. They said they needed Rs.10,000 very urgently and that I should collect it within a month. I accepted it as I felt honoured to do this service to my *Sat Guru*. I began in right earnest by writing letters of appeals to my closest industrialist-friends and to Swamijis of reputed Ashrams, requesting for funds!

One morning, at the construction work near Sri Bhagavan's shrine, Dwaraknath Reddy suddenly appeared and asked me : "Ganesh! My *Gurudev* Swami Chinmayananda called me one day to come to Bombay urgently. On reaching there, he virtually scolded me: 'Dwarak! What is the use of listening to my lessons on *Advaita Vedanta*, when the *Samadhi shrine* of the greatest *Advaitin* ever born on earth – Bhagavan Sri Ramana – remains incomplete and unfinished, even after so many years after his *Mahasamadhi*? Ganesa goes on sending us letters begging for funds! Shame on you, being such a wealthy man! Go! Go to Sri Bhagavan's Ashram and see that the *Samadhi* shrine work is completed at the earliest !' Yet, to be frank with you, Ganesh, I hear rumours that the funds are being misused. And that, they allege, is the real reason for the non-completion of the *Samadhi* shrine. But *Gurudev* insists that I help the Ashram. I am now in a dilemma. Will you help me?"



V. Dwaraknath Reddy

I too was frank with Reddy, in giving him a fitting reply: "Dear Brother! You know I came away from my job, giving up my attachment to money. Actually, Mataji Krishna Bai removed that demon-like attachment from my entire system. I am living inside the Ashram, all the 24 hours. Right now, we are conversing near and in front of Sri Bhagavan's sacred *Shrine*. I swear that the conduct of the management is impeccable and beyond reproach. But there is no inflow of funds, despite sending many appeals to devotees. Believe me, dear brother, this is the truth!" He patted me on my back reassuringly, with an understanding smile. I went around the Holy Hill that night though it was very late. In the morning, my father called me into the office, proudly handing over a bundle of new currency notes, he said to me, "Dwaraknath Reddy left last night, after meeting me and giving me this large donation of Rs.10,000 towards the construction of Sri Bhagavan's

shrine. He requested me to thank you for the vital help you extended to him !” This was some time in 1966. This gave me a great fillip as it was an enormous help. Strangely, but happily, donations from others also started to pour in, as well – which helped us expedite the completion of the temple over the sacred ‘**Ramaneswara Mahalingam**’.

In 1967, the entire construction of the temple over Sri Bhagavan’s *Shrine* was completed and its *Kumbhabhishekam* ceremony was also performed. Of course, my grateful heart profusely thanked Swami Chinmayananda (who was then in America). Naturally, through the four days of the *Kumbhabhishekam* ceremony I grew much closer to Dwaraknath Reddy who had come to attend the function.

The next great event at Sri Ramanasramam was to celebrate Sri Bhagavan’s *Birth Centenary* in 1980 in as grand a manner as possible. The celebrations included the performance of *Kumbhabhishekam* to the shrines of Sri Bhagavan and the Mother, after elaborate renovation and some prescribed ritualistic alterations inside the two shrines. All this needed an enormous amount of money. For this, I had to travel from one big city to another and seek the financial support of devotees of Sri Bhagavan and from spiritually inclined people in general. With a grateful heart, I again record here, how kind Swami Chinmayananda was to me, in giving me encouragement and support.

I had gone to the ‘*Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan*’ office in Bombay to meet its powerful secretary, N. Ramakrishna, and to offer my prostrations to him as he had met Sri Bhagavan and received his blessings even at a very young age. When I reached, there was a large crowd waiting outside its building which effectively kept me from entering it. A car suddenly arrived and Ramakrishna rushed to it. Swami Chinmayananda emerged from the car and climbed a raised platform from where he was to give a talk. He then turned and looked around.

Seeing me at the back of the crowd, he bent towards Ramakrishna and whispered something. Ramakrishna immediately came rushing towards me and took me along with him and Swamiji into the building. When the three of us reached Ramakrishna’s office room, Swamiji gave me a seat next to him and with all affection, asked me whether I needed anything -- any help. When I told him that I had come only to prostrate to Ramakrishna for his being an Old Devotee of Sri Bhagavan, Swamiji responded heartily, “**Good! Now, you can prostrate to TWO Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan!**” He turned to Ramakrishna and said, “Ramakrishna! Ganesa is very dear to me. Whatever help he needs, you should extend it to him, unflinchingly! Will you, Ramakrishna?” That day, I was very much emotionally moved realising the extraordinary love, kindness and support Swami Chinmayananda always extended to me! A similar situation took place at New Delhi, as

well! What extraordinary attention showered by a world-renowned Swamiji on such a small fry like me!

In 1982, when I was continuously deeply involved in conducting Sri Bhagavan's *Birth Centenary celebrations*, the Chinmaya Mission invited me to conduct and preside over a similar a function near Trichy – in the temple town *Thiruvanaikaval*. Swami Chinmayananda was the special speaker. At that time, Swamiji was conducting a *Gita Jnana Yagna* at Trichy. Swamiji compelled me to stay with him in the house of his host – a wealthy diamond merchant – who owned a palatial building on the outskirts of Trichy. Swamiji proudly asserted that it was I who helped him conduct his first *Gita Jnana Yagna* at the Shrine of Sri Bhagavan in Arunachala. At Thiruvanaikaval, in his special address, Swamiji paid very rich tributes to Sri Bhagavan: “Sri Ramana is not a theme for discussion; he is an experience; he is a state of consciousness. Sri Ramana is the highest reality and the cream of all scriptures in the world – the *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Upanishads*. He was there for the entire society to see how a Master can live in perfect detachment from the possessions – though living in the mortal form but living as the integrity, beauty and purity of the Infinite. Such a mighty Master was Sri Ramana.” The talk was a scintillating one, indeed!

That was the time when Swami Chinmayananda had returned from America after his heart surgery. An American lady-doctor devotee was accompanying Swamiji during his travels. In the evening, he would sit on an easy chair in the large verandah and devotees would meet with him and receive his blessings. Swamiji asked me to sit close to him. He clapped his hands and the lady-doctor brought two pills in a silver casket. Holding aloft the pills and turning to me, he said, “Ganesa! Look! These tablets are in between Swamiji and *Yama*, the God of Death! Two small tablets prevent the God of Death from taking away Swamiji along with him!” Swamiji was always full of jokes, most of them on himself!

That was the time Swamiji was burdened with the construction work to complete his Ashram '*Sandeeepani Sadhanalaya*' at Powai in Bombay. He said that corruption in the government was ruling the country and spoiling it. He added vehemently, “Corruption should be rooted out from the country at all costs!” He further said that for the completion of a construction, they urgently needed a hundred bags of cement. There was a ration in the distribution of cement and the government was in control of it. The Chief Minister, the Public Works Minister – all were totally dedicated to Swamiji. He had pleaded with them to send him 100 bags of cement. They too had assured Swamiji that it would be done immediately. But the cement never arrived. An office clerk working under Swamiji approached him and humbly said, “Swamiji! No minister will help you, as they are themselves powerless in front of all the corruption. You will never get the cement in the right way. Give me Rs.1000/- more than the cost of the cement and I shall get it for you

within two hours!” It was done, and the 100 bags of cement did arrive, within two hours!” This was narrated to me that evening by Swamiji, with his usual hearty laughter!

After some time, a bright looking young engineer employed in a big factory, prostrated to Swamiji and appealed to him, “Swamiji! I am very unhappy. My boss and my subordinates are all neck-deep in corruption. They are all forcing me to follow suit. But, Swamiji! I will never indulge in corruption. I want you to bless me that I continue to remain flawless and ever corruption-free.” Swamiji blessed him, “I bless you, my boy! Remain pure, aspire for purity! God’s blessings are fully on you! Never indulge in corruption!” The youth left holding his head high, and swearing to never indulge in corruption!

After he left, Swamiji turned to me and broke into his characteristic laugh! “Did you see the ‘drama’ I played? What else to do? If I had told him what I told you just before he came, he would have been shattered, psychologically! The youth’s stability is more important to me than anything else!”



V.Panchapakesan

In the 1990s, under the guidance of Yogi Ramsuratkumar, I was traveling abroad quite a lot. One oft visited venue was Hong Kong, where Smt. Sarala Panchapakesan and Panchapakesan -- a most compassionate couple dedicated to spiritual causes -- were my hosts. Their love and tender care always made me feel as if I was their child. I too looked upon them, with the greatest reverence and deepest affection! Their friends too were very evolved souls. One among them was the devout couple, Smt. Sashi Madnani and Vir Madnani.

A delightful young man Vir was a successful industrialist and businessman in Hong Kong. Quite often, this very happy couple would come to Pancha’s house and take us all for morning walks on the hill. Soon, I became very fond of them.



Smt.Sarala
Panchapakesan

One day, Vir and I walked quite fast and went far ahead from the rest. It took a long time for them to catch up with us. Meanwhile, we sat on a rock under the shade of a tree. Waiting for the rest of the group, I went into meditation. After a little while, when I opened my eyes, I saw Vir weeping. He was sobbing audibly. I did not panic since I only felt spiritual vibrations emanating. With tender love and deep affection, I touched Vir enquiringly. He gave me an affectionate embrace and said, “These are tears of joy and gratitude, Ganesan! Today is my *Gurudev*’s day and his very thought makes me melt into ecstatic joy!” “Who is your *Gurudev*, Vir?” “Swami Chinmayananda! Do you know *Gurudev*?” I happily narrated anecdotes that revealed how close Swamiji had permitted me to be to him. Vir listened keenly to every anecdote. Then, Vir unfolded to me a most intimate and thrilling turn of events that took place in his life, due entirely to the Grace of Swamiji. It was now my turn to listen to him with rapt attention, admiration, awe and wonder!



Vir Madnani

“Many do not know *Gurudev’s* true greatness,” started Vir. “It’s a pity. They generally accuse him to be a money collecting machine! How cruel and unfair! Now, listen to my story! Late one night, my auditor and lawyer telephoned me and said that next morning I would be in the streets, as everything – all my shares -- had collapsed, wiping out every penny that I had invested in them. Though they expressed great sympathy, they couldn’t suggest any remedy. I was shocked and in intense suffering. I loved my wife and my twin sons so deeply that I didn’t want them to bear the brunt of bankruptcy. What to do, should I run away and abscond? I was literally writhing in pain, almost turning mad! Just then, another phone call came. It was from my *Gurudev*. He commanded me to come to the Hong Kong airport at 3 that morning, as *Gurudev* then had to fly to Australia at 6 a.m. from there. He ordered that under no circumstances should I inform anyone about *Gurudev’s* visit and that I should meet him, all alone. I waited at the airport lounge. *Gurudev* arrived, hurriedly sat me next to him and put a bag on my lap. He commanded me to open it up and look. He said that there were five million Hong Kong dollars in it. Enough to tackle my initial losses. He advised that I should, along with my auditor and lawyer, take appropriate action that very morning itself before anyone comes to know of the calamity that had struck. I was dumbfounded. But, *Gurudev* didn’t stop with that. He continued, ‘Send your wife and twin sons to Australia and I will keep them with myself. On coming to know from you that everything is under control and all right, I will send them back to you. I do not want them to be affected in any manner. Looking after them and their comfort is my responsibility.’ I simply obeyed my *Gurudev’s* instructions to the letter. Ganesan! It took time for everything to be ironed out. Yet, by *Gurudev’s* grace, I started standing on my legs again. Look at me, now! How happy I am! My two sons are studying at the Cambridge University in England. Every one in our family is in excellent condition. *Gurudev* is a mighty personality and multi-dimensional too! He never afterwards talked about that money, never demanded it back! Can you believe it? A wandering Swami giving relief to a broke businessman by lending money, without any financial conditions, but purely out of true compassion! Now, tell me, Ganesan, am I not right to shed tears of joy, at a single thought of my beloved *Gurudev*?” It was my turn to give ‘Veer’ Vir an embrace so tight that it revealed all the joy that was welling up in my heart !



Sashi Madnani

Once, Swami Chinmayananda was asked: “What is so great about Sri Ramana Maharshi? Why does Swamiji revere him, over and above all other great masters?” Pat came Swamiji’s solid response, “**While all other Masters solved the problems of suffering seekers, Sri Ramana Maharshi dissolved them all !**”

My Obeisance to Swami Chinmayananda !



Gurudev Swami Sivananda and Swami Chidananda

SWAMI CHIDANANDA



Life

Sridhar Rao – that was the name given by his parents to Swami Chidananda -- was born on the 24th September, 1916. At the age of eight, Sridhar Rao's life was influenced by one Anantayya, a friend of his grandfather. Anantayya used to tell him stories from the great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Consequently, doing *tapas* (austerities), becoming a *rishi* (Sage), and having a vision of God, became the only goal of Sridhar Rao's life.

His cheerful personality, exemplary conduct and extraordinary traits earned for him a distinct place in the hearts of all teachers and students; and also, with others whom he came into contact with. In 1936, he was admitted to Loyola College, Chennai, whose portals admit only the most brilliant students. This period at a predominantly Christian College was a significant one. The glorious and noble ideals of Lord Jesus, the Apostles and other Christian Saints, found in his heart a synthesis of all that is best and noble in the Hindu tradition. To him, study of the Bible was no mere routine -- it was the Living Words of God, as alive and as real as the sacred words of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. His subtle inner vision enabled him to see Jesus in Krishna, not Jesus instead of Krishna. Even at that young age, service to lepers became Sridhar Rao's ideal. He would build them huts on the vast lawns of his home and look after them as though they were deities.

Although born in a wealthy family, he shunned the pleasures of the world quite early in his life and devoted himself to seclusion and contemplation. In the matter of study, it was the spiritual books which had the most appeal to him, more than college books. The works of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda took precedence over all others. He shared his knowledge with others and would talk to them of

honesty, love, purity, service and devotion to God. He would exhort them to perform *japa* of “Rama-Nama”. While still in his twenties, he began initiating youngsters into this great “Rama-Nama”. He was an ardent admirer of the Ramakrishna Math at Chennai and regularly participated in the *sat sanghs* there. The call of Swami Vivekananda to renounce, resounded within his pure heart. He always felt thrilled to be in the presence of Sages and Saints, who visited Chennai.

In June 1936 – at the young age of 20 years -- he disappeared from home. After a vigorous search by his parents, he was located in a secluded Ashram of a holy Sage, not far away from Tirupati. On persuasion, he returned home. The short separation was but a preparation for the final parting from all forms of attachment to family and friends. Even at home, his heart was dwelling only on the silent Inner Life of listening to the mystic sound : “OM”. Hence, the seven years that he spent at home were marked with seclusion, service, intense study of spiritual literature, self-restraint, control of the senses, simplicity in food and attire, abandonment of all comforts and practice of austerities which enormously enriched his Inner Spiritual strength.

As a youngster of nine years of age, Sridhar Rao went through the book, ‘In Quest of God’, by Swami Ramdas. It opened up a whole new vista of India he had never before known or imagined. It was in this book that he first encountered the terms ‘*samadhi*’ and ‘ecstasy’. He was then consumed with an overwhelming desire to meet with Swami Ramdas, and when he was 16 years old, he got his first *darshan* of Swami Ramdas at ‘Anandashram’.



‘Young’ Chidananda with Gurudev Swami Sivananda

When Sridhar Rao left home and was about to take the ultimate step of final renunciation, he wrote a letter to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, praying for his blessings, and got an immediate reply of assured blessings, along with Sri Bhagavan's *Prasad* of *Vibhuti* and *KumKum*.

Sridhar Rao was already in correspondence with Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. He obtained Swamiji's permission to join his Ashram. In 1943, he arrived at Sivananda Ashram; and, spontaneously took charge of its Dispensary. He became the man with the "healing hand". His divine healing hand attracted large numbers of patients to the "Sivananda Charitable Dispensary". His early trait of service to lepers found complete and free expression as divine love, based upon the supreme wisdom that all are one in God. Patients from the neighbourhood, who suffered from the worst kind of diseases, came to him. To Sridhar Rao, any patient was none other than Lord Krishna Himself. He would serve him with tender love and compassion.

In the service of the sick, Sridhar Rao realised he had no separate existence as an individual. Birds and animals claimed his attention, as much as human beings. His deep and abiding interest in the welfare of lepers had earned him the confidence and admiration of the Government authorities. They elected him as the Vice Chairman of the Leper Welfare Association. In addition, he delivered lectures, wrote articles for magazines and gave spiritual instructions to the visitors. When the "Yoga Vedanta Forest University"-- now known as the "Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy" -- was established in 1948, Swami Sivananda appointed him as its Vice-Chancellor. As its Professor of Raja Yoga, Sridhar Rao gave brilliant expositions on Maharishi Patanjali's "Yoga Sutras".

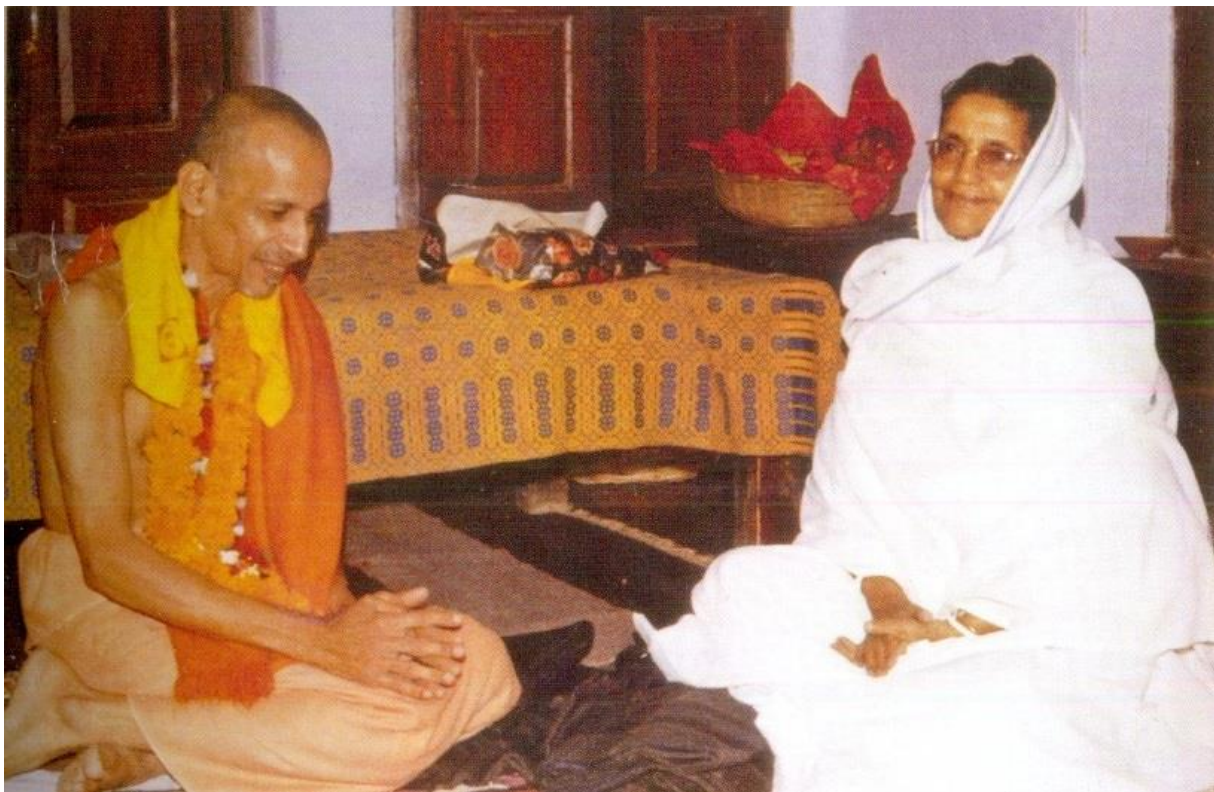
It was in the first year of his stay at the Ashram that he wrote his *magnum opus* "**Light Fountain**", the most popular biography of his *Gurudev*, Swami Sivananda. *Gurudev* once remarked, "Sivananda will pass away, but **Light Fountain** will live on for ever". Under the guidance of *Gurudev*, he founded the 'Yoga Museum' in 1947, in which the entire philosophy of *Vedanta* and all the processes of *Yoga sadhanas* are depicted in pictures and illustrations. Towards the end of 1948, *Gurudev* nominated him as the General Secretary of "**The Divine Life Society**". Thus, the heavy responsibility of the entire organization fell on his capable shoulders.

On *Guru Purnima* day, the 10th of July, 1949, Swami Sivananda initiated Sridhar Rao into the holy order of *sannyasa*, and gave him the name "**Swami Chidananda**", meaning, 'one who is in the highest Consciousness and Bliss'. On the instructions of his *Gurudev*, in November, 1959, Swami Chidananda embarked on an extensive tour of America to broadcast the message of Divine Life. In August 1963, after the *Mahasamadhi* of his *Gurudev* Swami Sivananda, he was elected as President of the "**Divine Life Society**". Chidanandaji toured the length and breadth of India, Malaysia and South Africa to serve the

devotees. It was always at the behest of devotees, staying far away from their Mother India that Swamiji undertook global tours. Wherever he went devotees received him cordially and listened to him with rapt attention.

Ma Anandamayee Ma, who loved and respected Swami Chidanandaji deeply, once visited the Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh. Swami Madhavananda, the Vice-President and Swami Krishnananda, the General Secretary were there but not Chidanandaji, the President, who was abroad. Out of affection, Ma said, "Chidananda Baba is like that ! Madhavananda is in *Bhakti*-line, Krishnananda is in *Jnana*-line, and Chidananda Baba is on airline!"

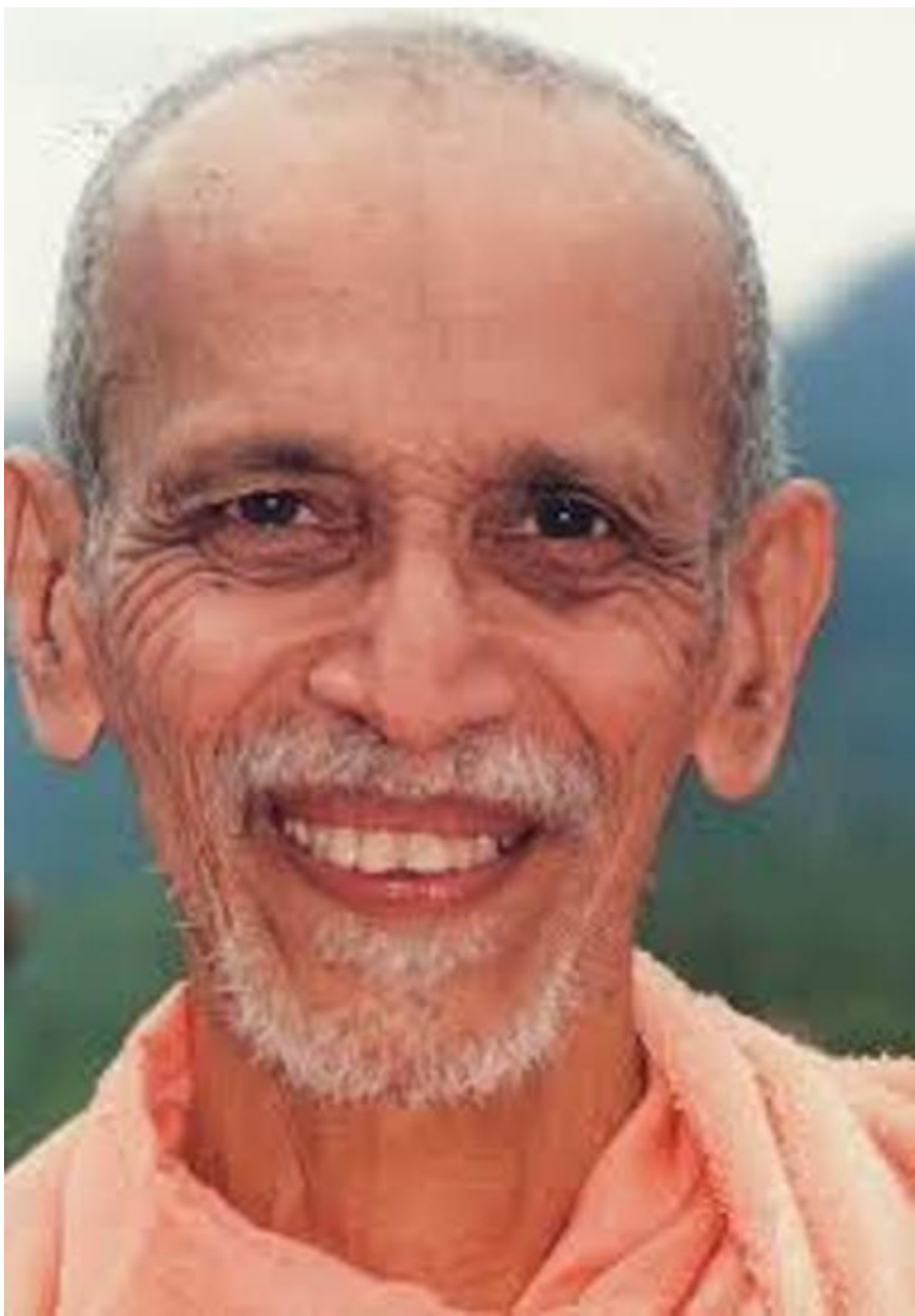
Narrating this, Swami Chidanandaji said, "When I saw Ma next, I asked her, 'Ma, when will you liberate me from this 'airline'?!'"



Chidanandaji's humble prayer to Ma Anandamayee Ma : ".....Ma ! Liberate me....."

In his later years, Swamiji started taking retreats into Inner Silence, by staying at Uttarkashi branch of Sivananda Ashram, for the sole purpose of being with himself. During those days, Swamiji was seen totally introverted and fully absorbed in inner silence. People who have had, on those occasions, the good fortune of having Swamiji's *darshan*, expressed that Swamiji glowed with an aura of pure Bliss and Peace.

Swami Chidanandaji attained *Mahasamadhi* on August 28, 2008.



Swami Chidananda

Quotes of Guidance from Swami Chidananda

“Wake up at dawn each day to salute the Universal Being. Bow down in adoration unto Him. Stay in a state of serenity -- filled with happiness and contentment. Change your angle of vision. Feel that the whole World is the manifestation of the Lord. Be the conqueror of your mind, the subduer of your desires and the master of your destiny.”

“Life is an inward journey of the Spirit. It is a journey that has no arriving or reaching, for, it is a journey without movement. It starts from the point where you have to arrive.”

“You should act your part in the scheme of things as dictated by the situations in which the Lord has placed you. You are where you are, and what you are, due to the Will of the Lord. Every movement, every force, every form of energy, all power, is a manifestation of the great Universal Power, the Universal Source.”

“Silence is the most real part of your ‘being’. When you are alone, you are silent. Silence is the only way in which one can express ‘That’, which is beyond all speech and thought.”

“Consciousness indwells all beings and brings about unity in the midst of diversity. Diversity is a fact. The Unity is a greater fact. Diversity may change, but the Unity does not change, and therefore it is the Truth.”

“You come from a realm of everlasting ‘Life’. In that Light of Reality, you have no birth and no death, no beginning and no end. You are that Light of lights. You are Peace and Bliss. You are complete and whole. One has to rise to this experience of Self-Awareness, which by itself will liberate you from bondage. And, this, indeed, is the great Mission in Life of every individual soul.”

“From time to time, mentally offer your life at the feet of God : ‘Oh Lord ! Whatever I do, all my acts, I offer at Thy feet’. Thus everything becomes linked up with God and all activity becomes sacred and sanctified.”

“The more cravings and desires one has, one suffers greater forms of restlessness. Therefore, simplify your life, and you will find yourself on the road to inner peace.”

‘Maharshi’ Patanjali said : “By imbibing equanimity towards one’s higher ones, loving friendship towards one’s equals, compassion and kindness towards one’s lesser ones and indifference towards evil doers, one will easily and effortlessly delve and retain one’s peace of mind.”

CHIDANANDAJI AND ME

In the 1960s, great efforts were made to get devotees to visit Sri Ramanasramam but without much success. At that time, N.S. Rao, the owner of a big firm in Chennai, arrived with his devout wife, Vatsala. I attended on them with special care. During our conversations, I came to know that Mrs. Rao's brother was a '**Swami**' in Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh. That was the time when only the names of Swami Sivananda, Swami Ramdas, Swami Nityananda, Swami Purushottamananda, Swami Tapovan Maharaj and Swami Narayananda were well-known in spiritual circles. On enquiring, Mrs. Rao told me that her brother's name was "**Swami Chidananda**". I listened with closed eyes and strangely felt an inner thrill!

A few years later, when we successfully completed the construction of Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi* Shrine, the Ashram management was advised by the traditional *Vedic pundits* that at least two realised souls -- ***Jnanis*** or ***Siddha Purushas*** -- should be invited. Their presence, the *pundits* insisted, would enrich the power of the rituals. When I was consulted, I had no hesitation in suggesting two names - **Janaki Mata** of Tanjore and **Swami Chidananda**, President of Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. Though I had known Janaki Mata from my childhood, it was my mother who insisted that she be invited. Likewise, the then Ashram Trustee, K. Padmanabhan, fully supported my suggesting the name of Swami Chidananda. By that time, I had heard that Swami Chidananda was a **Jivanmukta**, from advanced *sadhakas* and visiting *Mahatmas*.

Especially, Swami Chidananda's adoration of Sri Bhagavan gave me immense happiness :

"Bhagavan Ramana was an embodiment of *Jnana*. He was available to the devotees 24 hours of the day, but his silence was impenetrable. No one could transgress the border and take advantage of his availability. Even if most famous and important celebrities were to come and sit in his presence, the Maharshi would go out for his daily walk or work in the kitchen as if he was totally unaware of their presence. This divine indifference was born out of his freedom."

"In one moment of illumination, Sri Ramana Maharshi became established in "***I AM***" - 'I am neither mind nor body, Immortal Self am I. I have neither time nor space, I was never born.' In one split second -- one moment he was just an ordinary student and the next moment he was awakened into a State of Total Freedom, -- a Spiritual Perfection as clarified and declared in the '*Bhagavad Gita*' : "Fire cannot burn you; water cannot wet you; weapons cannot injure you; wind cannot dry you. You are unborn, permanent, eternal, beyond time."

Death is nothing to you” -- he became established once and for ever in that experience, and he never budged from that state. All his life, no matter what was going on around him, it did not touch him. It did not affect him.

“Every true devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi observes the ‘Royal Path’ of -- to think, meditate and reflect upon the *Vichara Marga* -- Self-enquiry of ***“Who Am I ?”***. ”

When Swami Chidananda arrived in 1967, I took keen interest in making his stay comfortable and attending to his personal needs. He was especially kind to me. He was the most humble *sannyasin* I had ever come across, after the unassuming and inimitable *sannyasin* of ‘Anandashram’, Swami Satchidanandaji.

Swami Chidananda was full of humour. The very first night, I took him to the room – allotted to him and his attendant – I had already seen to it that his bed was fixed with a mosquito net. On seeing it, Swamiji gave a smile and told his assistant, “Remember! All objects in the world are ‘holy’ – whatever you see or touch are ‘holy’. However, one thing should never be holy because then it cannot be used! Can you tell me what it is?” The assistant and I looked at each other in puzzlement. Swamiji himself broke the silence, “A mosquito net should never be holy – it should not have holes!” We all laughed together !

Swamiji pleaded with me to narrate whatever incidents I knew about his *Gurudev*, Swami Sivananda’s visit to Sri Bhagavan in the 1920s. Kunju Swami and Viswanatha Swami had earlier conveyed to me about that eventful visit of Swami Sivananda and I was only too happy to recount its details: “Swami Sivananda was a gigantic figure and he would stand outside the door of the Hall in which Sri Bhagavan was seated. He would then touch the feet of any devotee who came out after prostrating to Sri Bhagavan! And, with joy, Swami Sivananda used to express that even to touch the feet of those who have had the great good fortune of prostrating to Sri Bhagavan, was by far a true spiritual blessing ! Sivananda was residing in the town of Tiruvannamalai; and, every day Swami would himself cook a North Indian meal, bring it to the Ashram by bullock cart and personally serve it to Sri Bhagavan. He would explain each dish to Sri Bhagavan. Swami’s contention was that since Sri Bhagavan would not travel to North India, Sri Bhagavan should at least taste the characteristic dishes of Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bengal, and other North Indian states. Swami also observed that in Sri Bhagavan’s presence, devotees sang devotional songs in almost all the Indian languages, but not in English. So, he would compose extempore English verses in praise of Sri Bhagavan and sing in Sri Bhagavan’s presence in his sonorous voice. Sri Bhagavan appreciated them and also accepted them in his all-consuming silence.”



“.....solemn ceremony of Kumbhabhishekam over Sri Bhagavan’s Samadhi Shrine (June 18,1967).....”

The *Kumbhabhishekam* celebrations took place from June 14 to 18, 1967. On the night of culmination of all rituals, Swami Chidananda was the only person permitted inside the cordon of purely *Vedic* priests. Swamiji insisted that I also sit by his side. The *puja* and *arati* - waving of lights - to the consecrated shrine of ‘**Ramaneswara Mahalinga**’, was the fitting finale. Swamiji appealed to me with intense humility and devotion, “Ganesan! Will you please do me a great favour? I want a few sacred flowers to be taken directly from Sri Bhagavan’s Shrine of Grace and given to me. I will preserve them with me, with the greatest reverence, all my life, for, I am fully aware of the sacredness of their power to protect and guide me, wherever I am.” When I handed over the flowers to Swamiji, he gave me an embrace of blessings. I remember with happiness and reverence that encounter, even today!

On his return to the Himalayas, Swami Chidananda, published the following description, in their Ashram journal, “***The Divine Life***”: “The solemn ceremony of *Kumbhabhishekam* to the new construction raised over Sri Bhagavan’s *Samadhi* Shrine, took place on the 18th June and this *sevak* (‘Swami’ always referred to himself in the third person) was present there at the loving invitation of T.N.Venkataraman, President of Sri Ramanasramam. It was really a grand and an inspiring event and during the three days I was there, the blessed presence of Bhagavan Ramana was felt as a tangible inner

experience - at once purifying, sanctifying and spiritually elevating. I had the unique good fortune of meeting great devotees like revered Muruganar, Arthur Osborne, Smt. Nagamma and Venkataratnam and such others – all of whom had the supreme blessedness of close contact with Sri Bhagavan during his lifetime. Also, I had the privilege of getting *darshan*, of bowing before the holy saint Janaki Mata – the God-intoxicated devotee of Sri Bhagavan. I was happy to meet them all and also revered Dr.T.M.P.Mahadevan and to listen to his beautiful speech in Tamil. The entire *Kumbhabhishekam* ceremony conducted by a select group of a large number of learned *Vedapathis* and *Shastris*, with meticulous care according to strict *Vedic* injunctions, was most befittingly conducted and it was a grand success. My warmest congratulations to the trustees of the Ashram for raising this worthy memorial over the divine resting place of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. His presence and power indeed radiate from this vibrant Shrine of Grace.”

Ten or more years later, when I was in the Himalayas I visited Swami Chidananda, President of Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. He expressed immense happiness and blessed me profusely. He called out to his secretary and told him something in Hindi which I could not understand. His secretary brought a small beautiful casket in silver. With all devotion, Swamiji opened it, showed it to me and said, “These are the sacred petals of the flowers taken from Sri Bhagavan’s Sacred Shrine and you were kind enough to give them to me on that *Kumbhabhishekam* day at Arunachala. They bless me and protect me, most powerfully, especially during my tours abroad!”

I requested Swamiji to tell me about the greatness of his *Gurudev* – Swami Sivananda. He was very pleased to share with me the following: “People knew *Gurudev* only as a spiritually great person. Many do not know that *Gurudev* was an ocean of compassion full of practical understanding. In those days – the 1940s and 50s – keen spiritual aspirants, especially from South India, would often run away from home to the Himalayas in quest of spiritual attainment. Many of them would be guided to the ‘Madras Ashram’ – as the locals used to call Sivananda Ashram. The moment *Gurudev* met the aspirant, especially if he was from Tamil Nadu and very serious about his *sadhana*, he would talk to him in Tamil and say, “Why did you come to this kindergarten school? You belong to the University! Go! Go to Sri Ramana Maharshi at Arunachala. His presence is his guidance! His presence is his blessings! You now need only his advanced spiritual guidance! Don’t waste your precious time by aimlessly wandering in the Himalayas, thinking you are in search of Truth! Truth is seated at Arunachala in flesh and blood! Fall at his sacred feet! Rush!” Sometimes, the aspirant would have no money. *Gurudev* would enjoin one of us to accompany such aspirants to Delhi with instructions to buy a ticket for them on a train to Madras, mostly on the Grand Trunk Express. We would also be instructed to give the penniless traveler additional pocket money for expenses on the way!

Gurudev was most practical in worldly matters as well, while extraordinarily elevated in spiritual attainment!”

What a great *Guru* and what a great disciple!

Decades back, almost every year, I used to visit the Himalayas, in the protective company of Anuradha. Our main interest in those persistent visits was to meet with our dear and revered friend, philosopher and guide, **K.V. SUBRAHMONYAN** (“**K.V.S.**”) and try to persuade him to come back to Holy Arunachala. In those days, KVS was staying at an Ashram in Haridwar or at another Ashram situated in one of those hills and finally settled at Uttarkashi. We both were truly eager that just as I brought in and looked after the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan, I should take care of this ardent Gandhian -- following Sri Bhagavan’s ‘Teaching’ -- whose health was in poor condition. He would respond to our pleas, with the following words: “Sri Bhagavan’s guidance I am waiting for. The moment He gives His signal, I would come and stay like a ‘door mat’ at His Abode of Grace”.



KVS : “.....I would stay like a ‘door mat’ at His Abode of Grace.....”

It gives me tremendous joy to report that for the past twenty years, pious KVS is residing inside the premises of Sri Ramanasramam, giving guidance, solace and clarity to innumerable visiting pilgrims, who come to the Ashram from all over the World. KVS is a spiritual treasure, indeed !

Whenever I was with KVS in the Himalayas – especially, when he was staying at Uttarakashi – I would request him to show me around the most famous Mountain in the World and its hidden treasures of spiritual beauty and beatific splendours. With joy he would take me to spiritually surcharged sacred places, like, ‘Gangotri’ (the place of origin of Ganga Mata) ‘Vasishtha Guha’, ‘Lakshman Joola’, ‘Sivananda Ashram’, etc. On one such visits, KVS took me to Rishikesh and made me stay at Sivananda Ashram, for a couple of days. Its President, Swami Chidananda, was away abroad. We were given a room above the Ganges, with all comforts – made luxurious for the stay of the Ashram’s visiting Auditors. We were thus enjoying the Glory of Mother Ganges serenely flowing, by through the large windows of our room itself,. We felt so very blessed!

After a long time – perhaps, a gap of many years – KVS caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror on the wall; and, literally felt startled! With innocence, he asked me, “ Oh ! Is it how I look !” I replied, “Yes, dear KVS ! You look marvellously beautiful, charmingly attractive and captivatingly mesmerizing !”

Seated on the window sills and viewing *Ganga Mata*, KVS began sharing his close association with and admiration for Swami Chidanandaji. Whatever KVS had shared, I make an honest attempt to recapitulate and present, hereunder :

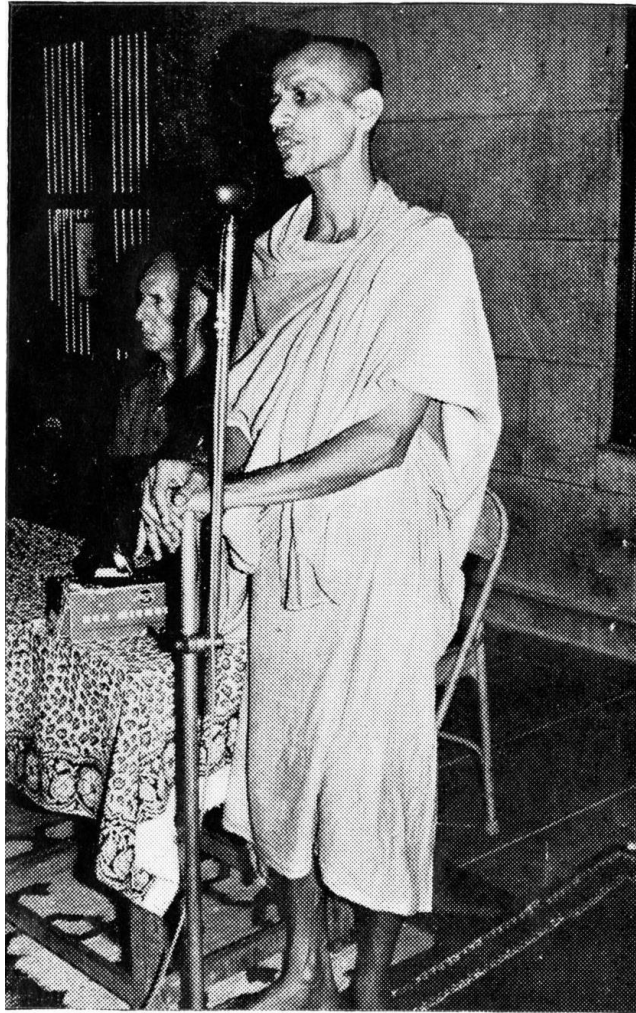
“Swami Chidanandaji came to Swami Sivananda at Rishikesh around 1943 as a young man of 27 years old. He belonged to a wealthy family which lived in a palatial bungalow in Madras with a piano in it, on which his mother used to play. In addition to his native tongue – Kannada -- he spoke Marathi, Tamil, English, Hindi, Konkani and Tulu.

“It is said that even as Sridhar Rao was first seen coming to see him, Swami Sivananda spontaneously said in Tamil : '*Namma Aalu Varaar*' ('My own man is coming'). Swami Sivananda was known to be a great mind-reader. Soon after, one day, when he was with some visitors, Swami Sivananda pointed to Sridhar Rao bathing in the *Ganga* and said 'He will be my successor.'

“Every year, before *Maha Sivaratri* -- the occasion when earnest aspirants were being initiated into *sannyasa* -- Swami Sivananda would ask Sridhar Rao if he would be initiated into *sannyasa* and Sridhar Rao would say '*Gurudev! I am not yet ready.*' However, after six years, when Sridhar Rao gave the same answer, Swamiji said 'If you are not ready, who else is ready? Come on.' Sridhar Rao became “***Swami Chidananda***” and never looked back.

“Swami Ramdas of Anandashram, Kanhangad once said, 'You will know a Saint when you live with him.' It was true in the case of Swami Chidananda. It is said that only a *Jnani* can tell recognise a *Jnani*. But when one was with Swami Chidananda, it was like being with Sant Jnaneswar, Sant Eknath or Sant Tukaram. He radiated a saintly aura, all the time.

“Swamiji was a great *Karma Yogi* soaked in ‘*bhakti*’, exuding the fragrance of *Jnana*. *Guru-bhakti* was his middle name. Once when some disciples asked Swami Sivananda if they could celebrate Swami Chidananda's birthday, he replied 'It is our good fortune that we could celebrate his birthday.' On another occasion, he said, 'Oh ! Chidananda should have been my *Guru*, I his disciple. The roles have been reversed !' ”



Swami Chidananda : “...Bhagavan Ramana is ‘Pure Awareness’ ...”

“Swami Chidananda was a great admirer of Bhagavan Ramana whose *darshan* he had once. Addressing *sadhakas* during a ‘*Sadhana Week*’ in 1990 at Rishikesh, Swami Chidananda said, 'When I say ‘Pure Awareness’, I refer to the state in which Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Ma Anandamoyee Ma were.' On another day he said, 'Sadasiva Brahmendra and Bhagavan Ramana were born *Siddhas*. Such men are very rare.'

“Swami Sivananda told his disciples and devotees: ‘Serve, give, love, meditate, purify, realize’. Swami Chidananda exemplified this *Guru Upadesa*, throughout his long life. Chidanandaji was generous to a fault. If people made cash offerings especially to him, he would give them all away. He ate very simple food and in his last years, he had nothing

but fried corn and curds. His long-time secretary Swami Ramaswarup once said, 'Swami Chidananda Maharaj is the only *Yogi* I have met.'

“Some sayings of Saints and Sages have the quality of *Mahavakyas*. There are many such *Mahavakyas* of Bhagavan Ramana -- the most important being '*Summa Iru*' = “Be Still”, “Be the Self”. The following guidance of Swami Chidanandaji to the devotees have the resonance of *Mahavakyas*:

'Think always of the sufferings in the world.'

'Think always of Death.'

'Think always of the lives of Saints.'

'Think always of God.'

Swami Chidanandaji was and is a great *Mahatma* !

I offer my salutations to Swami Chidanandaji, with all my Heart !

Jai Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj Ki Jai !





SWAMI MUKTANANDA



Life

Swami Muktananda, fondly referred to as *Baba Muktananda*, exemplified the importance of '*Guru Bhakti*' and its vital role in spiritual advancement. His monumental exposition on '*Guru Bhakti*' is a valuable reference for all seekers: "The devotee, by concentrating his heart and mind on the beloved *Guru*, gradually comes to see 'him' in all living beings and then, sees 'him' pervading the entire Universe. This brings about an attitude of surrender and love and finally the experience of Absolute Non-duality. This one-pointed concentration on the *Guru* takes considerable discipline and steadfastness. However, '*Guru Bhakti*' is not 'roses all the way'. The true devotee, accepting all as the Grace of *Guru*, finds equal delight in the thorns as well as the rose petals. Ultimately, faith in the *Guru* is the master-key to unlock the boundless treasure of Eternal Bliss. My *Gurudev*, Bhagavan Nityananda used to say, '*There is no greater God than 'faith' !*'"

Swami Muktananda was born in 1908 near Mangalore in Karnataka, in a prosperous family. His name was Krishna Rau. At a very young age of 15 years, Krishna Rau met Bhagavan Nityananda, a wandering *avadhoota* (a naked *sadhu*) who profoundly changed his life. Krishna Rau left home and began his search for the experience of God. He studied under Siddharudha Swami at Hubli, where he learned Sanskrit, Vedanta and all branches of Yoga. He took *sannyasa* in the Sarasvati order of the Dashanami Sampradaya. He was given the name : "*Swami Muktananda*", meaning, 'the one ever dwelling in the Bliss of Liberation'. Mataji Krishna Bai was initially spiritually guided by Siddharudha Swami. A number of great persons of that time had received powerful guidance from this Saint of Hubli. The *Mahasamadhi* of Siddharudha Swami, made Swami Muktananda wander in India -- walking and staying with many Sages and Saints.

After more than 20 years of search -- throughout the length and breadth of India -- in 1947 Muktananda went to Ganeshpuri to get the darshan of Bhagawan Nityananda, the Saint whom he had met, when he was in his teens. Bhagawan Nityananda gave Swami Muktananda the Shaktipat initiation in the early hours of 15th August 1947. Muktananda often said that his spiritual journey didn't truly begin until he received Shaktipat from Bhagawan Nityananda. About his profound and sublime experience, Baba Muktananda said :

“Bhagawan Nityananda stood facing me directly. He looked into my eyes deeply. Watching carefully, I saw a ray of light entering me from his pupils. It felt hot like burning fever. Its light was dazzling, like that of a high-powered bulb. As that ray emanating from Bhagawan Nityananda's pupils penetrated mine, I was thrilled with amazement, joy, and fear. I was beholding its color and chanting ‘Guru Om’. It was a full unbroken beam of divine radiance. Its color kept changing from molten gold to saffron to a shade deeper than the blue of a shining star. I stood utterly transfixed. He sat down and said in his aphoristic fashion, "All *mantras*... one. Each..from “**Om**”. *Om Namah Shivaya Om*... should think, *Shivo'ham*, I am Shiva... Shiva-Shiva...*Shivo'ham*...should be internal repetition. Internal...superior to external.”

Swami Muktananda spent the next nine years meditating in a little hut in Yeola. He wrote about his sadhana and kundalini-related meditation experiences, in his autobiography : “**GURU - Play of Consciousness**”. In 1956, Bhagawan Nityananda acknowledged the culmination of Muktananda's spiritual journey, and gave him a small piece of land at Ganeshpuri, instructing Muktananda to create an Ashram there.

Between 1970 and 1981, Swami Muktananda went on three World tours, establishing a number of ‘Siddha Yoga Ashrams’ and six hundred Meditation Centers, spread over many countries. Swami Muktananda became very popular as a “*Shaktipat* Guru”, since ‘*Kundalini*’ awakening occurred so very easily in his presence,

His ‘Siddha Yoga Path’ teachings were :

“See God in each other.”

“Honour your Self. Worship your Self. Meditate on your Self. God dwells within you as you.”

The list of well-known celebrities who sought spiritual instructions from Swami Muktananda included California Governor Jerry Brown, John Denver, Isabella Rossellini, Diana Ross, James Taylor, and astronaut Edgar Mitchell.



Swami Muktananda being blessed by his Guru: Swami Nithyananda

Reverend Eugene Callender, a Presbyterian minister in New York City, described his meeting with Baba Muktananda for the first time at Carnegie Hall, in 1979 thus: "Baba Muktananda said something that I had never heard in all my years in Church, all my years in Sunday school, in Seminary, in Ministry: "**God dwells within you as you.**" I sat there dumbfounded. These words were very powerful. Before this, I had only heard that God was somewhere up in heaven. God was up there, out there, somewhere, but not in here, not in my own heart. And now, here I was being told that God is in me too. I was astonished... For the first time in my life, I began to feel the presence and the meaning of being "created in the image of God", and of God's "Holy Spirit" dwelling in me... I was filled with Bliss."

A person who chose to remain anonymous -- a PhD in Religious Studies -- wrote, describing his moment of *Shaktipat*, when he was 19 years old, conferred by Baba Muktananda, with a wand of peacock feathers, in 1975:

"I almost jumped when the peacock feathers, firmly but with a soft weightiness, hit me repeatedly on my head, and then gently brushed my face as Baba Muktananda powerfully pressed one of his fingers into my forehead at a spot located between my eyebrows.... I'm somewhat reluctant, to write about what happened next, because I know that whatever I say will inevitably diminish it, will make it sound as if it were a mere one more "powerful experience." This was not an experience. This was the 'event' of my spiritual life. This was full 'awakening'. This wasn't "knowing" anything, because you only know something that is separate from you. This was being the Ultimate - a fountain of Light, a dancing, ever-new 'Source'. Utter freedom, utter joy... Completely fulfilled, completely whole, no limits to my Power and Love and Light..."

To seek the blessings of Swami Muktananda, earnest devotees, seekers and aspirants from all over the World -- all the time of the year -- flooded 'Gurudev Ashram' at Ganeshpuri. Baba Muktananda too was unhesitatingly showering them all with his unique '*Shaktipat*' initiations. The Ashram was always busy -- it abounded with the most ancient form of '*Kundalini*' teaching and also affording the most modern amenities catering to the needs of its hundreds of Western devotees ! Everyone was getting what they were seeking for. The 'Gurudev Ashram' was the most popular of all Ashrams in those days !

Swami Muktananda attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1982.

Before his *Mahasamadhi*, Baba Muktananda appointed as his successor 'Swami Chidvilasananda', who continues to head the spiritual legacy of Muktananda. She travels all over the World and continues to spread Baba Muktananda's '*Shaktipat*' teachings.

SAYINGS OF BABA MUKTANANDA

“A ‘*Guru*’ looks like a ‘human being’ to the physical eyes, and it is very difficult for an ordinary person to see ‘God’ in that ‘human body’. Ordinary people say, ‘He eats like us, he drinks like us, he sleeps like us, he laughs like us and has fun like us’. But, in a *Guru*’s body, there is this ‘*Shakti*’ – this ‘Divine Force’ that is completely ‘alive’. That is what makes a ‘*Guru*’. As you follow the words of the *Guru*, one day that ‘*Shakti*’ transforms your very being into the ‘Being of the *Guru*’.”

“Within every person, there is this ‘*Shakti*’. It is the ‘Divine Power’. God’s Power. And, it is only because of this ‘Power’ that we live. This ‘Power’ is also known as the ‘Self’ or ‘God’. As long as you do not know the ‘Self’, no matter how much you try to improve on the outside, you cannot really improve.”

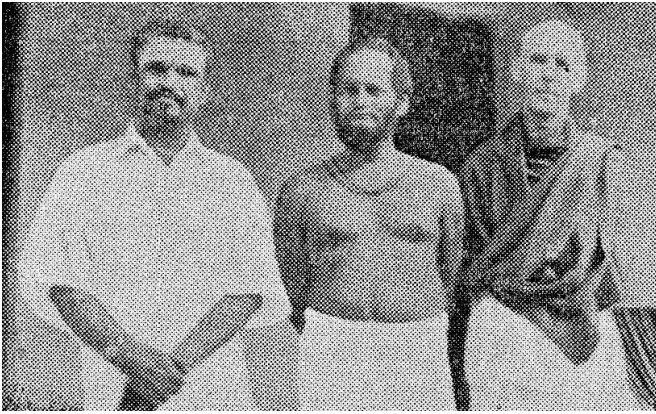
“People would ask *Gurudev* Bhagawan Nityananda, ‘O *Gurudev* ! I want to see God !’ *Gurudev* would reply, ‘Just look around ! Every one is God ! Every thing is God !’ “

“Every one of you experiences this, but you do not understand it. You do not know how He resides within. When you are awake, you perform so many actions – but, there is ONE within, who witnesses all your actions. When you go to sleep and dream, there is ONE within, who remains awake and watches all your dreams. If you know that ONE, if you know that ‘KNOWER’, then you know everything.”

“Ultimately, meditation makes us aware of our own ‘true nature’. It is this ‘awareness’ that removes all suffering and delusion, and this ‘awareness’ comes only when we see -- face to face -- our own inner Self.”

“The Sages have said that ‘*Shakti*’ is the Soul’s own energy. The purpose of *Shaktipat* is to awaken this energy in one, in order that one attains one’s highest potential, which is ‘Divine’.”

SWAMI MUKTANANDA AND ME



Swami Muktananda (centre), with Ashram President
T.N.Venkataraman and Arthur Osborne

When Swami Muktananda visited 'Sri Ramanasramam' in December, 1965, Arthur Osborne and my father, the Ashram President, received him. Mr.Osborne had met Swami earlier when he had gone to Bombay to preside over a celebration of '*Ramana Jayanthi*' being held there. Swami Muktananda too had participated in it. Swami was being taken around the Ashram and when they reached Sri Bhagavan's "*Nirvana Room*", Mr.Osborne described to Muktananda the last moments of

Sri Bhagavan and of how Sri Bhagavan merged with Father Arunachala, in the form of Light (*Jyothi*). Swami was solemnly absorbed in a state of total silence and reverentially prostrated to the picture of Sri Bhagavan, kept there on the sofa. When they came out, Swami Muktananda recalled with emotion what his *Gurudev*, Bhagawan Nityananda had told him about the highest spiritual state of Bhagavan Ramana : "My *Gurudev* extolled Maharshi Ramana being beyond body-consciousness, beyond all attributes and beyond all the dualities" !

On that occasion, I had the opportunity of being with Swami Muktananda and Arthur Osborne, as they talked about Sri Bhagavan. Mrs.Pratibha Trivedi, the 'Mother' of Baba's Ashram at Ganeshpuri, who accompanied Baba, acted as the translator. I was enthralled to listen to Swami Muktananda spontaneously glorifying Sri Bhagavan : "Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was a great Saint who always occupied a high place of reverence in the minds of holy people. His Divine Personality endeared him to all beings, as well. The word '*Ramana*' means 'One who plays' (*ramate iti ramana*). You may call him '*Atman*' or '*Guru*' : both are synonyms indicating the same 'Divine Power' of which this Universe is a 'game', is a 'play'. Maharshi Ramana was a divine soul, completely detached, beyond all differences, highly self-restrained and playfully living in the Ocean of Transcendental Consciousness -- the state of *Turiyatita*.

"I had the good fortune to be in the sacred presence of Sri Bhagavan for three days. Even during that very short stay, I found that any one entering his presence even for a moment, would experience a state of mental peace free from all thoughts. This shows that he was a fully realized soul in a Transcendental State, beyond all thoughts. Some believed him to be a *Siddha* or great Saint and some believed him to be an Incarnation of God. From the *Vedantic* point of view all are one in essence. God Himself appears in the world as

Siddha. So, *Siddha* is God and he is the entire Universe. Therefore everything is the manifestation of Bhagavan Ramana, the ‘Spirit at play’.

“Any one going even once to Maharshi Ramana felt as if the Maharshi belonged to him. This was because he really belonged to every one and every one to him. Wearing only a loincloth, he used to sit relaxed on the sofa; but still he looked more attractive than even the most richly attired Prince because, as my revered *Gurudev* Nityananda used to say, Maharshi Ramana was ‘beyond body-consciousness, beyond all attributes and beyond the dualities’. This indicates that he was on a plane far above bodily pain and pleasure, a plane inaccessible to ordinary mortals.

“Realization of the Self was all important in his teaching. To every one who asked, he unhesitatingly gave the guidance to meditate on the Self, worship the Self and be the Self. This is because, according to *Vedanta*, there is nothing worth knowing, hearing or seeing except one's true Self. One who was and is ‘**Ramana**’ is this Eternal Truth beyond all time, having neither beginning nor end. Therefore the path in quest of Truth shown by him will remain accessible to all for ever, because he proclaimed the Absolute Truth which remains unobstructed at all times, in all places and under all conditions. His message appears to some the oldest among the old, to others the newest of the new. Actually it is ancient and modern at the same time, because the concepts of old and new are imposed on the Self by the mind, while it is really ageless and eternal. Some people call the present times a new age, but according to the Maharshi all things, old or new, are projections of the same eternal Truth.

“Those who loved the Maharshi got from him the true Supreme Bliss attained by means of *Jnana* (Knowledge), *Yoga* (spiritual discipline) and *Bhakti* (devotion). This means that from him one got the essence of all spiritual practices. That is why I call him ‘**one who plays**’. He is the ever adorable Great Soul.”

When the Ashram President, my father, visited the Gurudev Ashram at Ganeshpuri, he was warmly received by Baba Muktananda. It was reported that they needed a large portrait of Sri Bhagavan to adorn their Meditation Hall. In due course it was prepared by Saldas and me; and, I took it to Bombay. N.D.Sahukar, the General Manager of the GODREJ Group of companies and his wife Smt. Mani Sahukar, took me and P.V.Somasundaram, carrying with us the portrait of Sri Bhagavan and presented it to Swami Muktananda. This large portrait of Sri Bhagavan now adorns the Meditation Hall at the Gurudev Ashram. At the time of presentation of the portrait of Sri Bhagavan to Baba Muktananda, I kept myself completely in the background, as Smt.Mani and Sahukar were ably handling the whole operation. However, the Swami was very kind to me and expressed that he wanted to spend

some time with me, exclusively. On my return to Bombay, I requested Sunil Damania, another very staunch devotee of Sri Bhagavan, to take me back to Baba, which he willingly did.



On behalf of Sri Ramanasramam, N.D.Sahukar and Smt.Mani Sahukar, presented a large coloured photo of Sri Bhagavan Ramana to Swami Muktananda Maharaj, at Sri Gurudev Ashram, Ganeshpuri

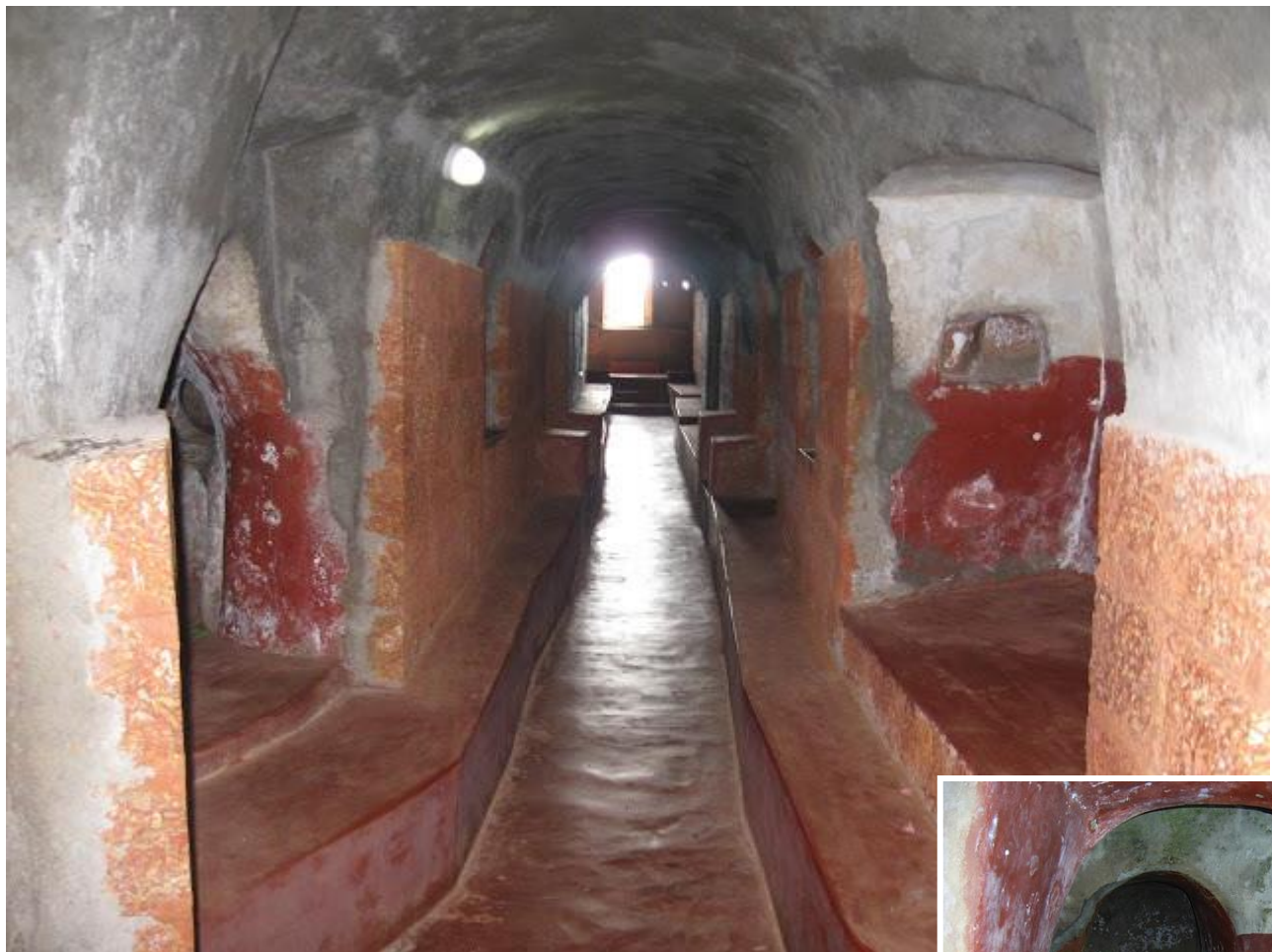
Swami Muktananda welcomed us and requested Mrs.Trivedi to be the interpreter. Baba wanted me to narrate to him what all I knew about his *Gurudev*, Bhagavan Nityananda – especially, how in his teen age, his *Gurudev* got spiritual guidance from Sri Bhagavan, which was not recorded anywhere else. I assured Baba that what all I was going to narrate to him, were all gathered by me from the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan – Kunju Swami, Viswanatha Swami, Dr.M. Anantanarayana Rao, Madhavi Amma and T.P. Ramachandra Iyer.

The following is what I shared with Baba :

“Swami Nityananda, as a village lad used to practice *ghusti* – a form of Indian wrestling. He was an adept in it. He used to challenge whoever wanted to pass through the street where he lived, to do *ghusti* with him. Only then, he would permit them to pass through. The whole village knew about it. One day, a very old *sadhu* with a very fragile body came into the street. As usual, the lad engaged him in his favourite play. The *sadhu* pleaded his inability citing his fragile body. On the boy not relenting, the *sadhu* pretended to do *gusthi* and rolled three times across the street embracing the boy. And wonder of wonders, with his physical touch, the *sadhu* passed on all his psychic powers to the lad.

When the *sadhu* got up and walked away, the boy too walked behind him. They climbed a small hillock. Suddenly, the *sadhu* turned back and told the youth that he had passed on to him all the *siddhi* he possessed - that was the purpose of his visit. He further advised the lad that there was no use in following him any further and that he would get the spiritual direction he needed from the Sage of Arunachala.

“The boy, Nityananda, reached the presence of Bhagavan Ramana at Arunachala. How many days he spent there was not reported. But, he did get specific instruction from Sri Bhagavan to go to Kasargod. The lad was already in a state of *unmatta* - spiritual madness. He walked all the way.

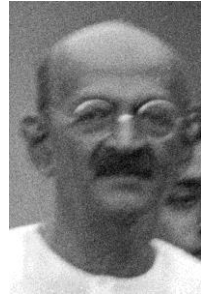


*Pancha Pandava Caves at Kadri :
“.....he built caves himself and meditated in them.....”*



“At Dharmapuri, he fainted; his body was lying down by a street. That night, when Dr. Anantanarayana Rao, a veterinarian, was returning home by car, he happened to see the

prone figure of the boy. He lifted him up, took him home and treated him with devotion by giving him a bath, food, medicines. Dr. Anantanarayana Rao's son, M. Ramakrishna Rao, had shown me a few photos of his father keeping the ailing boy on his lap. Suddenly, a few days later, the boy disappeared. He reached Kasargod, built caves himself on the hill and meditated in them.



“Madhavi Amma – wife of Dr. P.C. Nambiar -- told me that while she Dr. Anantanarayana Rao



Madhavi Amma

lived at Kasargod, she heard of the Swami who was then living in a dilapidated fort outside the town. People dreaded to go there, for, he would discourage visitors by hurling stones and making frightening sounds. Not deterred, she went to see the Swami. He was up a tree, and tried to frighten her away by shouting and throwing twigs down at her. She however approached him, undaunted. Swami came down, looked at her with

compassion and asked her where she was coming from. “From Ramana Maharshi’s Ashram,” she replied. Swami smiled and said, “That’s why you have no fear.” He then enquired about the Maharshi.

“T.P. Ramachandra Iyer, a lawyer devotee of Sri Bhagavan, told me that after Sri Bhagavan’s *Mahanirvana*, he went with a group of Ramana-devotees from Bombay to have the *darshan* of Swami Nityananda at Vajreshwari. Swami had locked himself inside a room and had not come out for months. The group got permission to sit outside the door, where they began chanting Sri Bhagavan’s *Upadesa Saram*. Suddenly, the door opened and Swami Nityananda appeared. He sat on the threshold, beating time with the singing, the very picture of Bliss. Many of his own devotees, who had not seen him for a long time, rejoiced at seeing him again. After the chanting, Swami touched the offerings brought by this group, and made indecipherable sounds and signs. Then, Swami went inside and bolted the door. His devotees told the group that they had been instructed by Swami to offer them food before seeing them off.”



T.P. Ramachandra Iyer

I narrated all this to Baba Muktananda who listened with rapt attention and thanked me for sharing it with him. Seeing the depth and intensity of Baba Muktananda’s *Guru bhakti*, an intense reverence for Baba welled up in me.

In 1982, I happened to be in Bombay on Ashram work, and came to know that Swami Muktananda had attained *Mahasamadhi* at Ganeshpuri. Thanks, again to Sunil Damania, I could go as a representative of Sri Ramanasramam. I also got the privilege of offering flower garlands to Swami Muktananda while his body was being interred into the sacred tomb.

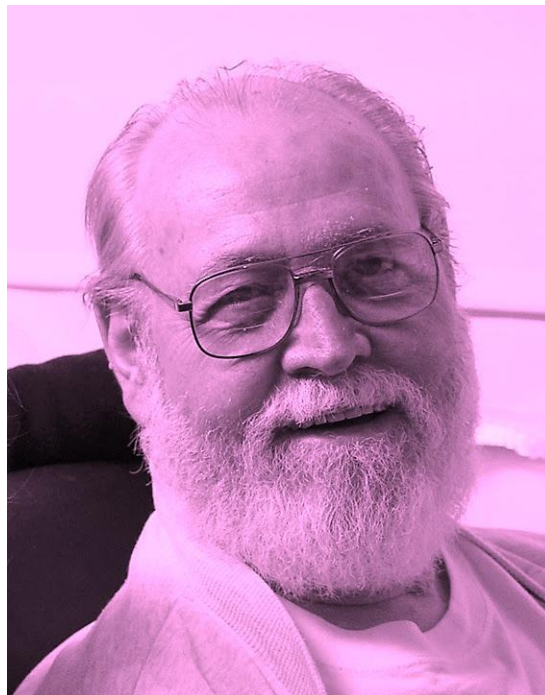
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I feel it is now the apt moment for me to pay a tribute to A. Ramana, the founder of AHAM Center. The simple but profound reason being that it was Swami Muktananda who spontaneously addressed the American, Dee Wayne Trammell, as **‘Ramana’** during a public audience! Swami Muktananda must have known that Mr. Trammell would be the person who would be teaching Sri Bhagavan’s ‘Self-Enquiry’ in North America.

Perhaps, it was Baba Muktananda’s predictive protection and inner guidance that powerfully guided A. Ramana to start this spiritual institution, ‘AHAM’ Center – totally dedicated to the Direct Teaching of Sri Bhagavan – first, at Greensboro and then, shifted to it’s own premises at Asheboro. He used to say: “I ventured this endeavour with a total capital of an ‘old typewriter’, plus ‘\$75’ donated to me by Elizabeth McDonald. We both worked very hard and built it up into it’s present position of strength and splendour.”

Baba assuredly must have blessed this beautiful institution, “AHAM” Center and it’s dedicated staff who constantly teach Sri Bhagavan’s ‘Self-Enquiry’ – “ I AM ” !

* * * * *



Dee Wayne Trammell : ‘Ramana Baba’

When he was five years old, A. Ramana had a true spiritual experience. A hot pot of water fell on his lap and scalded his leg. A mystic living around -- Uncle Billy -- moved his hand above the boy’s body back and forth, a few times. He touched the boy’s heart and murmured something, which the boy couldn’t remember. Snap, just like that, the pain was gone. In Ramana’s own words: “I was floating in the room, as it were. I felt myself as

‘Being’, and that the ‘Being’ was ‘I AM’. As a child, I could not explain it. It was going on. I stayed in that state, for about two or three years. It was extremely delightful!”

The same spiritual experience, repeated itself only when he was 44 years old. It happened inside a book-store in Houston, when he was looking at a picture of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi – the frontispiece of a book on the Life and Teaching of Sri Bhagavan – and, its very first chapter entitled ***‘Who Am I?’***. A. Ramana writes, “Seeing the picture of Sri Bhagavan and the title of the opening chapter, ***‘Who Am I?’***, re-awakened me fully. I was back to the awareness of ‘Being’ -- the same state that I had been in, when I was a child.”

It was around that time that Baba Muktananda was extensively touring America and giving experiences of *Shaktipat* by his mere touch. While other teachers were only explaining the depth of spiritual truth in words, Muktananda could help them experience a ‘beyond-the-body’ ecstasy. Mr. Trammell was drawn to Baba and he went to him with some friends. The moment Baba saw him, he put his hand on his head and said, “You are **‘Ramana’**. That’s your name. You are playing in God, revelling in God. That’s what **‘Ramana’** means!”

‘Ramana’ became his name, from then on.

When Mr. Trammell visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1980, he called himself only as ‘Raman’. Though Swami Muktananda specifically named him **‘Ramana’**, Trammell felt it not proper to have his *Guru*’s name in full and hence had removed the last syllable ‘a’ from his name. We both became very good friends and spent time together up on the Hill exchanging our adoration of Sri Bhagavan and the greatness and depth of his unique teaching of ‘Self-Enquiry’ – “I AM”.

During one of those sessions, I pleaded with him to go back to the original name given to him by Baba Muktananda, as the word, ‘Raman’ would refer to Lord Rama. He agreed. Yet, after a few years, he again faced a problem. Whenever he delivered a talk on Sri Bhagavan, he was referring to Sri Bhagavan as **‘Ramana’**, while his name was also **‘Ramana’**. Also, there was a need for an initial for every person in America, in all official matters.

It was my privilege to suggest to him: “You were kind enough to put a suffix ‘a’ to your name ‘Raman’. Now, I request you to add a prefix ‘A’ to your name ‘Ramana’. Let your name be **‘A. Ramana’**.” He was happy for he took it to mean, ‘Aham Ramana’. However, I wanted him to put his full name as **‘Arunachala Ramana’**”!

During one of my early annual visits to AHAM Center, Asheboro, to give talks on Sri Bhagavan, A.Ramana privately requested me about what he could do for his ‘Guru’ Ramana as an expression of gratitude to him. From my heart came the spontaneous response, “You should drop your body on the sacred earth beside the Holy Hill!” He said, very firmly : “Yes, I will do it!”

During his last days, however, I used to address him only as ‘**Ramana Baba**’ ! Thus, his name was embedded with the names of both Sri Bhagavan and Swami Muktananda, who was widely addressed as ‘**Baba**’!

When he came to Arunachala in 2010, he was very sick. His admirers in America urged him to fly back. ‘**Ramana Baba**’ was brave and flatly refused, thereby fulfilling his avowed prayer “to drop the body on the sacred earth beside the Holy Hill” -- **Arunachala**. I had the great privilege of interring his body in the tomb within the premises of “AHAM” Ashram, situated at Tiruvannamalai. His *samadhi*-tomb there, is serene and peaceful; and is, now being well-maintained.

‘**Ramana Baba**’ was truly a ‘*dheera*’ (the courageous one) – a fully surrendered devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi !

*My obeisance to **BHAGAVAN RAMANA** !*

*My obeisance to **BABA MUKTANANDA** !*

*My obeisance to **RAMANA BABA** !*



AHAM Meditation Retreat and Training Center -
Asheboro, USA





ABHINAVA VIDYATHIRTHA SWAMI



Life

Abhinava Vidyathirtha Swami was born on November 13, 1917, as the eldest son of a virtuous couple, Kaipu Rama Sastry and Venkatalakshmi, and was named 'Srinivasa'. He was endowed from childhood with devotion to God, detachment to sensory objects, fondness for noble people and good conduct, and became the recipient of the unlimited kindness of the then pontiff of the Sringeri *Sarada Peetham*, the renowned *Jivanmukta*, **Chandrasekhara Bharathi Mahaswami**.

Srinivasa proved to be a living testimony to the scriptural declarations regarding a perfect Sage. He had all the personal qualities that a *Mahatma* (a great Sage) should have – compassion for all, forbearance, purity, auspiciousness, absence of stinginess, freedom from jealousy, laziness and attachment.

One day Chandrasekhara Bharathi Mahaswami took Srinivasa with him on his evening walk to the *Kālabhairava* temple, situated atop a hill in *Narasimhavana*. On the way, his holiness spoke very strongly about the greatness of *vairagya* (dispassion) and *sannyasa* (renunciation) to Srinivasa.

He blessed him with the same words with which his *Guru* blessed and guided him.

“O Child! If you have the desire to cross the ocean of ‘suffering’ then listen to my words which is in consonance with the *Upanishads* and is beneficial to you. Having shaven your head, together with the tuft and having broken the sacred thread donned for performing sacrifices, take up the vow of *paramahansa-sannyāsa* (total renunciation). Very firmly cultivate the four indispensable spiritual means. Listen to the teachings of the

Upanishads through the nectarine words of the *Sadguru*. With faith and devotion, enquire for long, deeply on the Truth about the *Atman*".

The divine words of the great Sage had the necessary impact on the youth's mind.

When Srinivasa was just thirteen and a half years old, the *Mahaswami* gave him *sannyāsa* and, named him as "***Abhinava Vidyathirtha***" and nominated him as his successor to the *Sarada Peetham*.

The power of initiation from the *Guru* had an immediate impact on the disciple. Starting with the day he was initiated into *sannyasa*, Lord Śiva appeared in his dream and instructed the young Swami on '*Hatha Yoga*' practices, through seven successive nights. Each dream was a continuation of the preceding one, which included the various kinds of restraint of *prāna* like *sūryabhedana*, *ujjāyī*, *sītkārī*, *śītalī* and *bhastrikā* in such a way that the young Swami could clearly understand, grasp and practice them.

Chandrasekhara Bharathi Mahaswami spared time to personally familiarize the new Swami with the daily rituals and other duties of a *sannyasi*. He also initiated him into *mantras* such as the *Śrīvidyā* and *Narasimha mantra*.

Let us listen to Abhinava Vidyathirtha's own words, narrating as how his *Guru* taught him:

"When staying in *Narasimhavana* with my *Guru*, I used to go every evening to behold Goddess *Śāradāmbā* and remain there for up to an hour. On my return, he once asked me, "You have crossed the river and come. What thought arose in your mind?"

"What thought?" I wondered and replied, "There were various objects which I saw."

"What was new?"

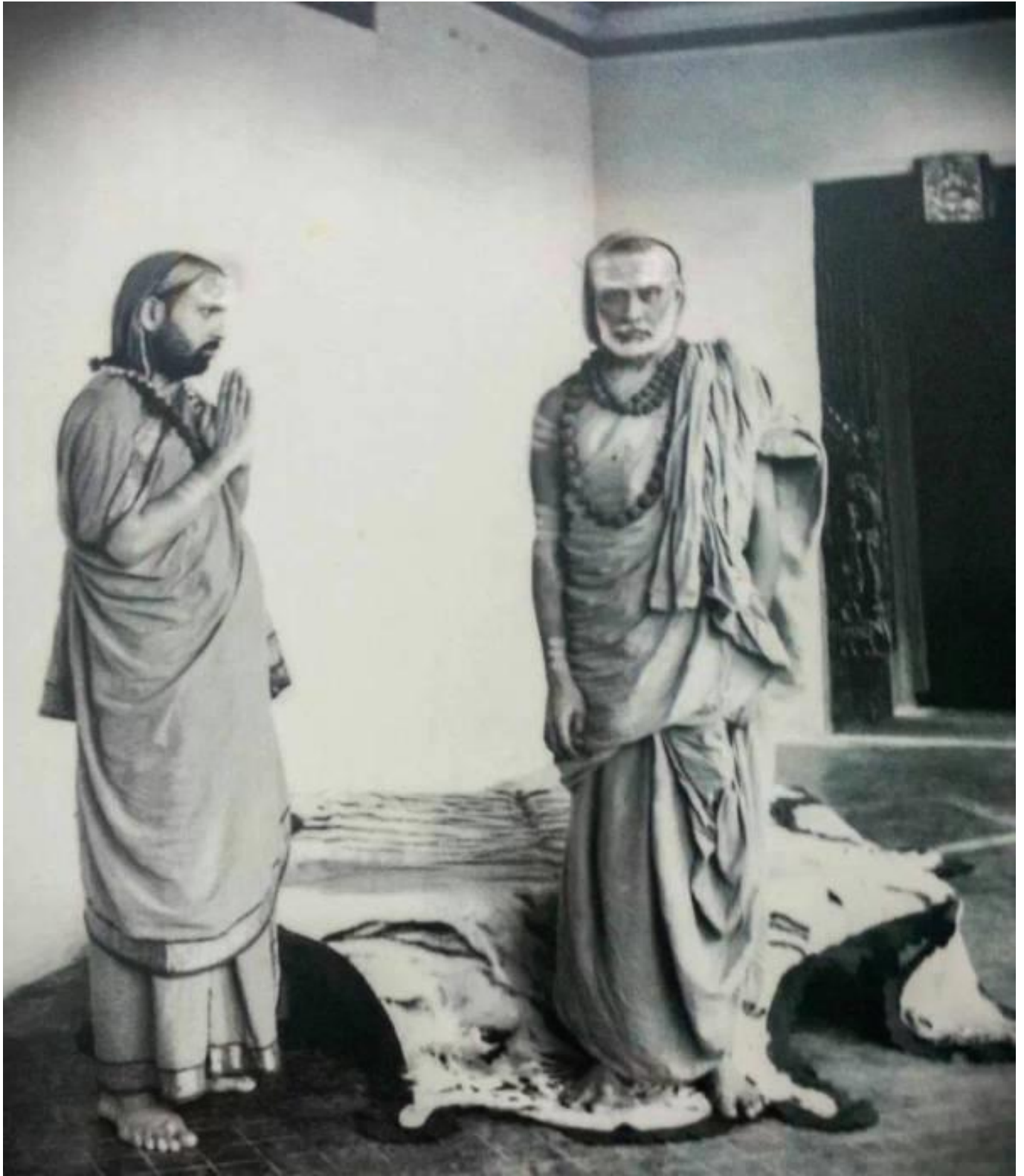
"Nothing. I saw what was visible."

"Must you see whatever is in the range of your vision?"

"If the eyes are kept closed, it is not possible to walk."

"You must see and yet not see."

"How is that possible?" To this, he said, "This is how we should ever conduct ourselves. When we walk, the feeling should be, 'In the big Ocean of Pure Awareness - the *Ātman* - a wave has arisen'.



Abinava Vidyathirtha Swami paying respects to his Guru Chandrasekara Bharati Mahaswami

There is no difference between the wave and the Ocean. Contemplation must be done in this manner. 'I am a wave in the Ocean of Bliss, in the Ocean of *Ātman*. In the thread of Pure Awareness, I am a gem. Through me runs the thread of unbreakable Consciousness'. Whenever some object is seen, one must hold on to the 'Witness Awareness.' When lying down for sleep, contemplate, 'I am now immersed in an Ocean of Bliss' and, with this feeling, begin to sleep. Let the wave merge back in the Ocean. Even when you talk to someone - repeat this idea in the mind. With practice, one uninterruptedly gets established in this experience".

"When walking, sitting, standing and even when lying down, this is how you must conduct your life. He who spends his daily life in this fashion gets firmly established in the *Atman*."

His Holiness – the young Swami - was enjoying *dhyāna* and *samādhi* on several forms of *Īśvara* (God), and then, switched from meditation on 'forms' to that of on the 'Formless' and quickly attained *Nirvikalpa-Samādhi*. Recognizing the profound realization of his disciple, Chandrasekhara Bharathi Mahaswami suddenly came to his room and said, "I knew that your mind was becoming more and more absorbed in *Nirvikalpa-Samādhi*. Last night, however, the Lord made it clear to me that your *samādhi* had become so intense that you would not emerge from it on your own. Unless aroused from *samādhi*, you would remain in it until physical death. As impelled by the Lord, I came to your room before the night ended and with great difficulty, I succeeded in awakening you. Regulate your *samādhi* and the introversion of the mind. Else, today itself, your *Nirvikalpa-samādhi* will become such that you cannot be aroused from it at all, by anybody. Do not leave me by entering irreversible *samādhi* and discarding your human form. There is so much to be done by you for me, for others and for the Mutt.

"While you can now manage to perform your routine activities, your mind is still too introverted to engage in the serious study of the *Tarka* and other *śāstras*. Only tranquility and happiness can be seen in your face. Even if I, to whom you are deeply devoted, were to cast off my body right now, your facial expression would not change. No matter how much you be provoked, not a trace of anger would be visible. Nothing of the world interests you at all. On you, however, rests the future of this great *Sarada Peetham*.

"Accordingly, though unswervingly established in *Brahman*, you should study diligently and master the *śāstras*. Further, you should learn to show interest, appreciation, concern, anger, curiosity and the like in your dealings with devotees, Mutt staff and others."

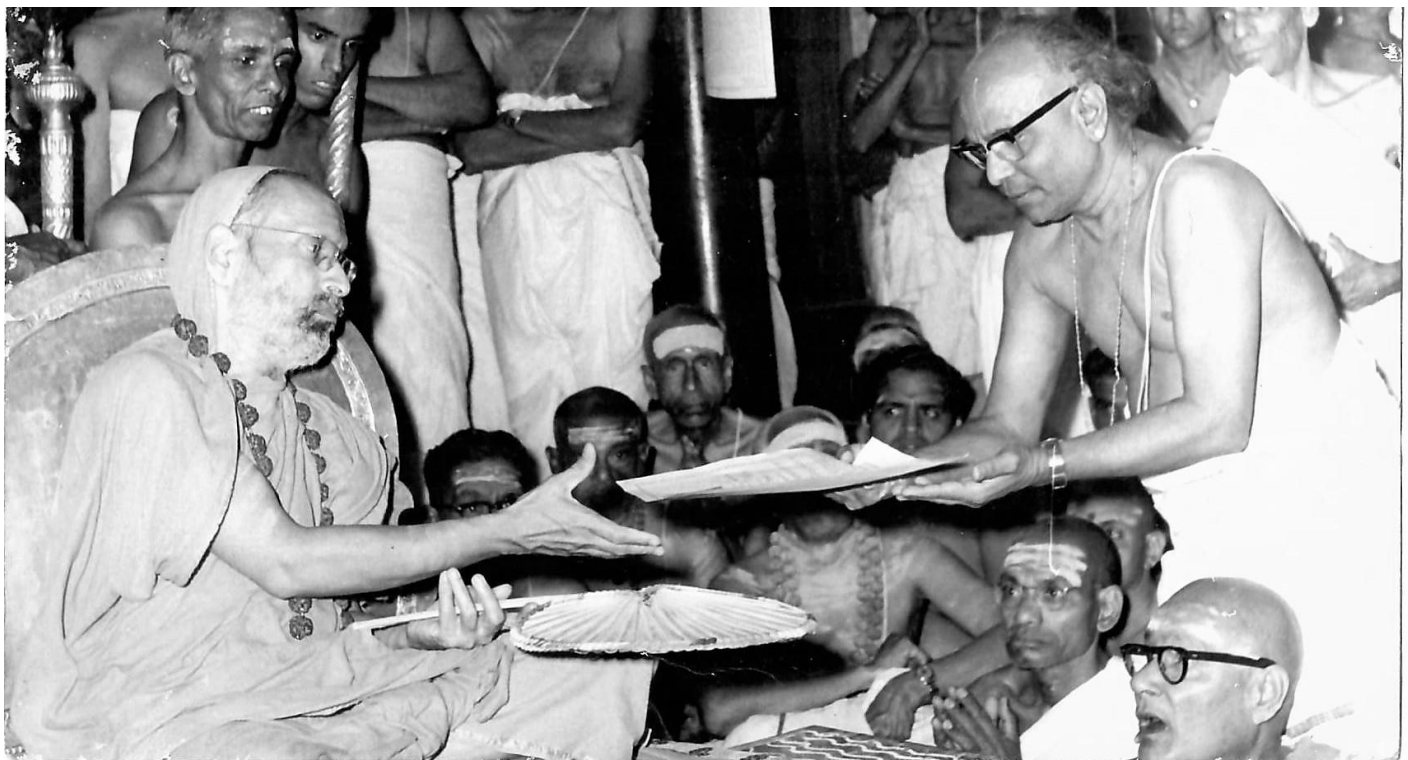
Even though established in the *Atman*, His Holiness accepted the instructions of his *Sadguru* to work for the welfare of the world. Slowly he came down from the stupendous height of his Realization and did tremendous work establishing various branch Mutts, *Dharmaśālās* and *Pāthaśālās*; and, shone forth as one of the greatest *Madathipathis* of the *Sringeri Sarada Peetham*.

Every work of His Holiness was an illustration and a reflection of his foresight and benevolence. He was a good administrator and was not upset when the government handed back the administration of the Mutt to him, stripping off all the *jagirs* (landed property) earlier in its possession.

Simple living and high thinking characterized his life. He insisted on doing his personal work by himself. He would take his attendant's assistance only if it related to pontifical duties.

However his great contribution is in selecting and handing over the light to the next *Jagadguru*, "Bharathi Thirtha Swami" on Nov 11, 1974.

From the second week of September 1989, he was not well. In the early hours of September 21,1989 he experienced chest pain and uttering '*Narayana*', Abhinava Vidyathirtha Swami merged with the Absolute !



Embar Vijayaraghavachariar being honoured by his Holiness for his performing harikatha [exposition] on "Ramana Vijayam" [Life and Teachings]



Sringeri Saradamba Temple

SRINGERI ACHARYA AND ME

The *Sringeri Sarada Peetham* was founded by Adi Shankara with Sureshvaracharya as the first Pontiff. A lineage of illustrious Sages has adorned this sacred seat, spiritually guiding humanity through the centuries. *Abhinava Vidyatirtha Swami* was its 35th Pontiff.

When I had the opportunity to meet with him, in the company of A.R. Natarajan and family, I found His Holiness's simplicity exemplary and his graciousness limitless. I feel that the best way I could pay homage to this illustrious and ever-gracious *Mahasannidhanam* – as he is addressed - is to recount what happened while we were with His Holiness.

The *Mahasannidhanam*, had a severe heart attack and hence was under the constant and immediate care of doctors. He was advised to avoid the strain involved in talking, walking and similar other exertions.

That was the first time I was in his presence and that too very close, as well. When we went in, the Acharya was seated. Natarajan introduced me to His Holiness and I fully prostrated to him. When I was lifting up my head, my face was very close to his and I saw him as a 'person'. Then, I was pleasantly surprised to see and observe the glittering 'golden colour' of the skin of his body !

Instantly, I remembered what my teacher *Pundit* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer once told me about the 'golden colour' of the skin on Sri Bhagavan's body : "When Sri Bhagavan was staying at Virupaksha Cave, I used to go and stay with him, almost every day. The very first day, I saw him standing on a rock outside the Cave when the Sun was shining on him. His whole body shone brilliantly with a 'molten gold colour'. It was an ecstatically stunning experience, for, I have never ever seen the skin of any human being in 'molten gold colour' ! After that, every time I was near his body -- throughout my life with him -- my heart would jump with joy to witness the same splendour of the 'molten gold colour' in him ! It was truly a spiritual ecstasy ! ".

In those days, I could not figure out how a human skin can shine like 'molten gold'; for , I had seen in life fair-skinned people, beautiful and attractive – but, that was only physical beauty; nothing spiritual about it !

Hence, I felt blessed that for the first time, I had the good fortune of seeing the 'spiritual colour' of 'molten gold' in His Holiness ! A true spiritual experience, indeed !

The purpose of the group's visit to Sringeri and meeting with His Holiness was with a specific important mission - very personal and private, indeed ! After such a long gap of many years, I feel, I can share it without any motive, for the exclusive cause of revealing how great the Sages are in alleviating the deep suffering of the seekers!



A.R.Natarajan

A.R.Natarajan was then a senior member of the Revenue Board. It was the ripe time that he was promoted as the Chairman of the Revenue Board. At the neck of the moment, a petition was sent to the finance ministry picking up complaints that he should not only not be made the chairman but should also be dismissed on the basis of 'corruption charges'. Basic enquiries were conducted and the charges on him that he "misused his official power and gathered enormous money to help Sri Ramakrishna Mission and Sri Ramanasramam".

A.R.Natarajan was the most uncorrupted Government Official applauded by every one around him – both in the office and in the day-to-day world of activities. He once declared to me, " I have studied law and hence know the law, thoroughly. Hence, I am fully aware of the 'power' entrusted to me as a high Government officer – the 'use' and 'misuse' of the power. I will NEVER misuse the powers!". After that I started noticing in him that he would use the office car, ONLY for executing office work; and, for all other purposes, he would use his privately owned car! He, thus, had close friends who were actually his admirers in Delhi, who had informed him of the danger awaiting him.

He came to the Ashram and confided with me, very privately, his fear of being unjustly dismissed from the high office. He sought my help. I took him to Sastri Mama and explained to him Natarajan's difficult position and helpless pains. Mama went into his usual '*Prasna*' method of getting guidance from the Divine within, through watching the breathing. After some time of quiet absorption, with closed eyes, he said : "Yes ! The dark forces have exerted their highest power; and the danger seems like unavoidable and imminent. Yet, I see the Divine Hand of Sri Bhagavan putting an end by cutting down all forms of danger. Natarajan will definitely be saved. Don't have any fear !" Both Natarajan and myself felt relieved.

With Sastri Mama's assured prediction in our hearts, that day we approached His Holiness's presence and sought his blessings. Natarajan said , " I have fear...." Before he could complete the sentence, His Holiness smilingly said, "How is it you say you have fear? You're a big Income Tax Officer and as such only people around you are afraid of you,they

say....!” Yet, His Holiness asked Natarajan to explain matters to him, which he did in minute details.

His Holiness solemnly closed his eyes and went into inner silence. After some time, he opened his eyes and said amidst his unique smile, “Yes ! The matter had taken a very bad and serious turn and had reached the top level decision-making which should have been very adverse towards you. See ! Mother *Saradamba’s karuna* (Compassion) on you. At the last moment She made the top authority to cancel all forms of accusations. Have no fear !”

Later, Natarajan got it officially confirmed what exactly took place, since the accusation was dropped. The then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi whose signature of approval for the dismissal of such a high official was necessary – called the Finance Secretary and enquired whether there was any remission on Natarajan’s part in the discharge of his official duty. The whole record did not portray any blame on him as an officer from the day of his direct recruitment into the Income-Tax Department. Then the Prime Minister ‘dismissed’ the entire procedure against Natarajan as ‘false accusation’ and re-confirmed his official position!

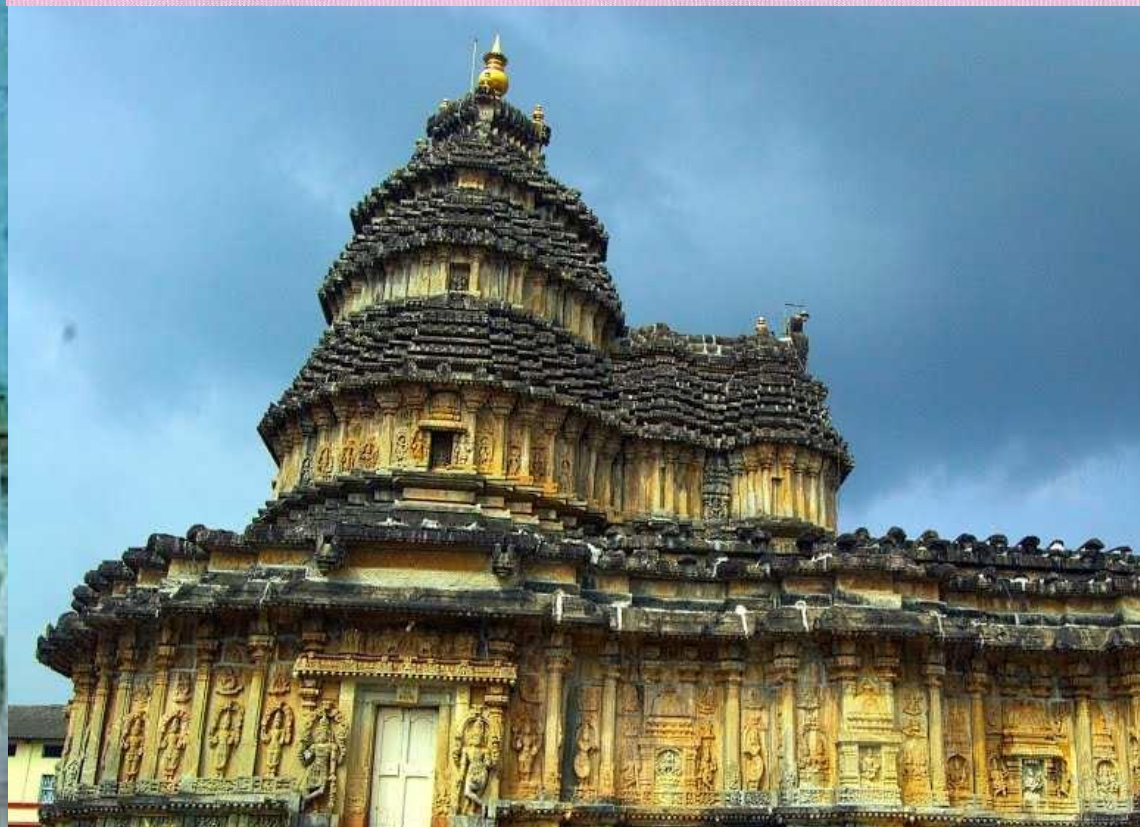
Sri Bhagavan and Goddess *Saradamba* profusely had blessed Natarajan. The unseen Grace and Blessings of Sri Bhagavan and Mother *Saradamba* were channelised with words through the ‘human voices’ of Sastri Mama and *Mahasannidhanam*! What a blessing from Sages and Saints !

* * * * *

In the *Mahasannidhanam’s* presence was seated, a very old couple. The old man was sickly and bent even in the sitting posture. His wife was narrating to His Holiness how her husband was suffering from so many diseases, how it was difficult for her to look after him and that *Mahasannidhanam* should bless them both and save them from hardship. *Mahasannidhanam’s* response was magnificent: “Oh! He has these problems! It is really painful and difficult to undergo such suffering. Take this *mantra akshada* [sanctified rice soaked in turmeric-juice). Don’t worry; everything will be all right!”.

The old lady took the *prasad* and sat at a distance. Again, she came up to him and repeated the same words of woe. His Holiness also responded with the same intensity, repeating the above words and also giving the *mantra akshada*. This happened nearly five times, continuously, without interval.

For an onlooker like me it was irritating. But there was not a trace of irritation, monotony, boredom or diminution of concern on the face of His Holiness. It was amazing to



witness his capacity to be tolerant and yet gracious! I remembered the saying that *Mahatmas* are like mirrors and reflect the same intensity of approach that is shown towards them! A demonstration of purity, tolerance, grace, compassion and intense spiritual relationship, indeed!

* * * * *

Next, the *Mahasannidhanam* referred to the shrine of the 'Papanasana Linga' in a cave on a hillock near Mysore and narrated the following:

"Some thirty years back we were going on a *yatra* (journey). When we were close to that hill I felt like going there and so we deviated and walked a few miles to reach the hill. Climbing up a particular place in the cave, the passage is so narrow you will have to bend and crawl to go in. Once you are through you reach a vast space where a *Linga* is placed. Behind the *Linga* there is a raised ground from where water sprung up and fell on the *Linga*, like a small waterfall, forming a natural *abhisheka* (giving a bath).

"I had heard about it long back and hence wanted to do my *sandhya* (offering evening oblations) there. But when we reached the interior of the cave we found that water was not flowing, though the moisture of water was visible on the surface of the earth. How to do the worship? For a moment there was hesitation. Then, spontaneously, I started chanting '*Purusha Sooktam*' (A hymn in Praise of God). By the time the chanting was concluded, water gushed forth from the raised ground and poured over the *Lingam* to our great delight, I had never before heard or read anywhere that '*Purusha Sooktam*' had such tremendous power!

"Next time, some years ago, we were passing that side. Coming to know about the above details from me, people numbering 30 or 40, following me, wanted to go into the cave. We all went in. Again, it was dry! Now, I kept quiet; but the *bhaktas* in one voice, as it were, chanted '*Purusha Sooktam*' with great fervour. Lo! Again the miracle happened! Water simply poured forth and fell as a small waterfall on the Holy *Shiva Linga*. We all performed *puja* and returned. For the second time, the uniqueness of '*Purusha Sooktam*' was demonstrated on that day too. The Lord's Grace is Supreme!"

The words of His Holiness narrating the whole episode in his lilting Tamil is still lingering in my ears. The facial expression of the *Mahasannidhanam* was that of an innocent child, filled with wonder and awe! How simple and gracious His Holiness looked!

* * * * *

Crowning the above anecdotes, occurred a most remarkable incident. A middle-aged man, perhaps some junior official touring that area for inspection, suddenly burst in and stood in front of His Holiness. He reported that he was going to perform the sacred-thread ceremony of his son on a particular day. He did not even - if I remember aright - have the courtesy to reverentially seek the blessings of the *Mahasannidhanam*; he gave the information in a casual way.

His Holiness was happy to hear that. With a gracious smile he gave him *mantra akshada* and blessed him and the *vatu* (boy). I was, again, amazed to see the Acharya's magnanimity, which looked million times magnified in front of the pettiness and callousness arrogantly demonstrated by the '*bhakta*'!

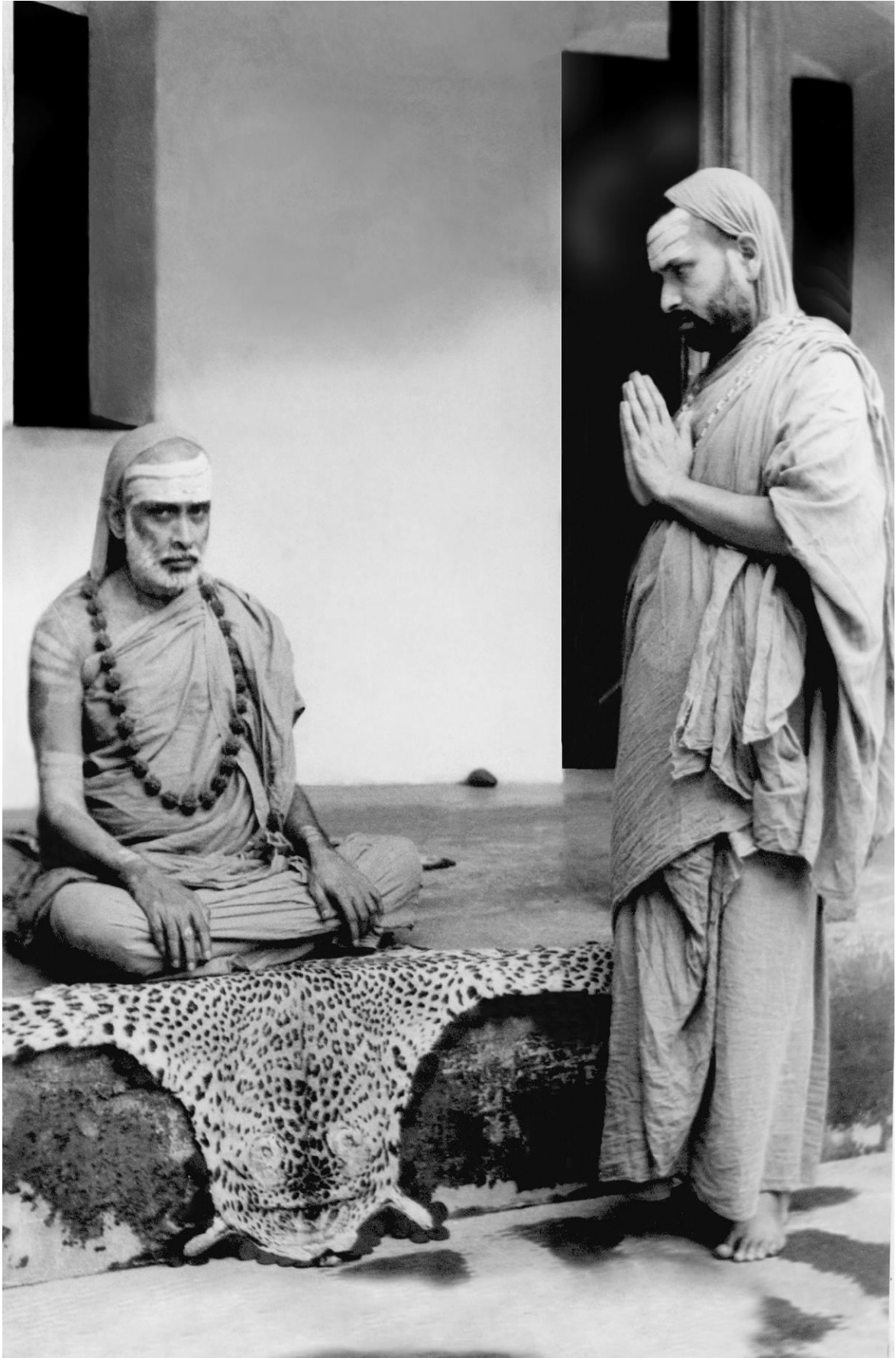
It was not all!

This man did not leave; and kept standing in front of His Holiness. Suddenly, again, in a casual tone, he asked the *Mahasannidhanam* who his *Guru* was. Such a question is not permitted in our tradition to be put to a *sannyasin*, not to speak of the head of such an eminent Spiritual Centre! I felt how impertinent that question was and feared that it might annoy His Holiness. But I was surprised by the reaction of His Holiness!

Mahasannidhanam as I previously said, was under strict medical advice not to get up, thereby straining himself. No sooner did the word '*Guru*' strike his ears, his face became "glowingly mellow, filled with devotional fervour"; and like a rubber ball he jumped from the seat and approached the wall where huge oil paintings of the previous *Acharyas* were hung. He reverentially went in front of the painting of Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswami and raised both his hands above his head in salutation. In a voice choked with *Guru-bhakti*, he said: "This is my *Guru* and *Acharya* Sri Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswami". He then moved and stood in front of the next picture; and again in a mood and tone full of devotional ecstasy, said: "This is my *Paramacharya*, Sri Sri Nrisimha Bharati Mahaswami." After standing a few minutes like that he came back, face glowing with spiritual ecstasy, as if he had met them in flesh and blood!

That day, I realised what was meant by *Guru-bhakti* (surrendered devotion to one's *Guru*) ! Intensity of devotion, total dedication and steadfast surrender are the marks of *Guru-bhakti*. Henceforth, I will never be casual in referring to my *Guru*; my whole being will be involved!

Great *Mahatmas* teach through practice, not by precept alone! And how marvellously they teach!



Abinava Vidyathirtha Swami paying respects to his Guru Chandrasekara Bharati Mahaswami



Koti Swami : 'A Siddha Purusha'

KOTI SWAMI : 'A *SIDDHA PURUSHA*'



Life

Mother INDIA abounds with Sages, Saints and Seers. They are of two kinds -- 'Mukta Purusha' and 'Siddha Purusha'. *Muktas* are those who have realised their true identity with the One Absolute Reality and could cogently expound their teachings -- rationally and logically. Spiritual treatises emanate from them. Though spiritually they soar far above ordinary mortals, they conduct themselves in the day-to-day life, quite normally. *Siddhas* are truly, fully spiritually elevated; but, they lead an abnormal life. Their behaviour may appear queer to the onlookers. They often possess *siddhis* (occult powers), like thought-reading, predicting the future, hypnotising and performing miracles. Even in their day-to-day activities, like taking food, they may follow their own strange ways. For instance, they might eat enormous quantities of food at one time and go without food for long periods. Despite such abnormal behaviours, their bodies show no marked change, at all!

Yet, in showering compassion on fellow-beings, including animals, birds and plants, the *Mukta* and the *Siddha* are identical. They love all beings equally and without a trace of attachment. The *Mukta* gives his Wisdom teachings clearly and systematically, whereas the *Siddha* is content to help people in his own queer methods which may perhaps be beyond the understanding of logical minds. However, for both, helping the poor, the needy and the suffering is spontaneous, natural and involuntary.

KOTI SWAMI - an acclaimed '*Siddha Purusha*' -- was living in Puravipalayam village in Tamil Nadu, and was well taken care of by a *Zamindar* (owner of very vast landed properties). My close friend, Ilaya Raaja, during one of his visits to the Ashram, told me : "Late in my life of spirituality, I was introduced to Koti Swami. I was eager to meet with a '*Siddha Purusha*' in flesh and blood. Coming to know of my deep eagerness, my friend, Soundararajan told me about one great '*Siddha Purusha*', living near Coimbatore, on the upper floor of a *Zamindar's* palatial house".



Ilaya Raaja - the 'Music Wizard'

Let us listen to Ilaya Raaja :

"My friend took me there. Who is this *Siddha*? What is his original name? Where does he hail from? How old is he? What is his teaching? These thoughts naturally crossed my mind before I met him.

"The *Zamindar* kindly took me upstairs and I saw the '*Siddha*' face to face. The immediate reaction in me was that my entire being collected together and dived within, making me vibrantly lost in myself. After garlanding him, offering my obeisance and putting a few eatables in his mouth (he is always fed by others; he does not eat anything himself), I waited for the '*Siddha*' to speak a few words to me.

"Suddenly, he turned his glowing eyes on me and said, 'Go ! Lie down there. Sleep! You are tired! You need rest! Go, go!' I lay down near his easy-chair and fell asleep, immediately. After some time, it seems he said, 'Enough! Now! You! Wake up!' Forthwith, I got up, absolutely fresh in body and mind! The tremendous tension that was surging in me all these days, was thus soothingly healed and removed. The '*Siddha*' granted me thus a blissful experience in his own child-like, simple but queer way. I was convinced, 'Yes! He is a great '*Siddha*', indeed!'"

"I gathered what little information I could about the Saint from the *Zamindar* and others there. He is known popularly as 'Koti Swami', 'Koti Thatha', 'Koti Siddhar' and 'Ponmudi Swami'. No one knew his real name; neither his place of origin nor his age. He often refers to individuals who lived 300 years ago, in intimate terms, like 'Thotapuri' of Sri Ramakrishna fame. He rarely drinks water, though he eats whatever is put into his mouth. Once in several months he asks for steaming hot water to drink, which he gulps all in one go!



Koti Swami : 'A Siddha Purusha'

He does not seem to sleep, and rarely answers nature's call. Though he looks old, he is hale and healthy. Peace prevails in his presence. His love is transparent, though there is no trace of attachment in it.

"Twenty-five years ago, the wife of the *Zamindar* went to see the *Siddha* near Palani. He got into her car -- he himself opened the door and sat in it. When he was brought to Puravipalayam and taken round the house, he saw every nook and corner of it and at the end, chose the corner of the upstairs verandah. He never got down from that place again! Since he repeatedly uses the word '*Koti*' (ten million), he has come to be known as '*Koti Swami*'.

"I asked him about '*Arunachala*' and about Bhagavan Ramana. He said, '*Arunachala* ! Very big ! '*Koti*' people go there. Oh! What a crowd there! Always, many many '*Koti*' people flocking! All *Mahans* (Saints)!' After a pause, '*Ramana Rishi* ! Very rich! He gives away everything -- to all! He has much to give! Not like me, I am a pauper!'"

Ilaya Raaja added : " '*Koti Thatha*' guides seekers in his own inimitable peculiar way. One has to be very watchful in grasping the real meaning of his utterances. When a close friend of mine asked him for '*upadesa*' (teaching), Swami said, "'*Koti*' people come and '*Koti*' people go. None is left behind!" My friend understood it to mean, 'Thoughts are plenty, they are the hindrances. Remain in the state where there is no trace of thought at all!'"

On hearing from him, the above glorious comments, I went into ecstasy. Seeing my condition, he took me to Puravipalayam, in his next visit to the Ashram. I was amazed to be in the presence of '*Koti Thatha*'. One day, I requested the *Zamindar* to arrange an exclusive private meeting with '*Koti Thatha*'. He agreed; and, one early morning, he sent me upstairs where '*Koti Thatha*' stayed alone. He bolted and locked the door leading to the stairs, so that I could spend time exclusively with *Thatha* .

"The whole experience of that blessed morning is evergreen in my memory. I observed that '*Koti Thatha*' was exceptionally 'alert, awake and aware', all the time. I started meditating seated at his feet, which were stretched straight on an easy chair on which he sat all the time. I was concentrating on the "*presence*" seated in front of me by focusing my attention on him. He was, as his wont, looking above, down, sideways without moving his head -- some times smiling, some times murmuring and some times laughing slightly aloud -- all to himself. I should share that the pupils in his eyes would move or roll all around; and, when the pupil of the right eye rolled towards the eastern side, the left eye's pupil would roll towards the western side. This spectacle happened quite often, too!

"Since I felt very happy in his presence, I was emboldened to pray to him, '*Thatha* ! I want your *Anugraha* (Grace)!'. He was looking away from me; and, suddenly turned his full attention on me and looked straight into my eyes and said, 'Is it possible for you to come 'There'?' I humbly replied from my heart, '*Thatha* ! I know, I can't come 'There'! But, if you take me 'There', I could definitely come 'There'!' He was very much pleased and replied, 'Ha! Well said, well said! Yes, That is true!' Then, followed a long period of total silence. *Thatha* continued to focus his attention on me.

"Suddenly, he gave out a big laughter and said, 'Oh ! I see '*Koti* ' planes, '*Koti* ' airplanes! '*Koti* ' people! '*Koti* ' happiness to all !'

"On my return to Arunachala, in gratitude to what I received from this incomparable '*Siddha Purusha*', I went around the Sacred Mountain, chanting, praying and in ecstasy. Near *Adi Annamalai*, suddenly I saw a halo forming itself on the sky near me, and I vividly saw the bust of '*Koti Thatha*'. He smiled at me, most graciously and repeated what he had told me at Puravipalayam, 'Oh! I see '*Koti* ' planes, I see '*Koti* ' airplanes! '*Koti* ' people! '*Koti* ' happiness to all!'

"I was thrilled ! Before completing the circumambulation of the Hill, I entered into the home of Yogi Ramsuratkumar and prostrated to him. I was intending to get an explanation from him. He happily asked me, 'Ganesa! You had been to '*Koti Thatha* '. Tell me in detail what all happened in his presence!' I was overjoyed and told him in minutest details what all had taken place. And, finally narrated to him the spectacle that took place a few moments back and requested him to give out its significance. He laughed and laughed repeatedly, beating me on the back by way of appreciating me and blessing me. And, said amidst laughter, 'Oh ! Can't you see ! '*Koti Thatha* ' is blessing you to go abroad ! He is implying that you will be flying - many times too! - and be giving talks on our Beloved Bhagavan's Teaching, benefitting many people there and making them very happy !'

Only a few years after that, Yogiji specifically gave me a firm direction that I should go abroad and give talks on the 'Direct Teaching' of Sri Bhagavan's method of 'Self-Enquiry'. While saying it, Yogiji reminded me of how a few years back itself '*Koti Thatha* ' had already predicted it!

Ours is indeed a *Punya Bhoomi* (Sacred Land) ! Where else can one hope to meet with great *Mukta Purushas* like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bhagavan Ramana; and *Siddha Purushas* like Seshadri Swami and '*Koti Thatha*'!

How blessed we are all!



Mother Mayee Ma

MOTHER MAYEE MA



Life

There lived at Kanyakumari – the southern most end of India – surrounded by the ocean, a mystic lady whose origin of birth or from where she came over there, no one knew. She was deeply respected by the people living in that big town, with true love and affection, though most of the time she would live alone only on the open sand dunes spread over the Ocean. Most people shunned her, though hordes of dogs would surround her, all the time. She would feed the dogs with biscuits; and hence, the scarce visiting-pilgrims who would go to her -- merely as spectators -- were advised to carry packets of biscuits to offer her.

Mother Mayee Ma, as she was fondly addressed, did not talk – much less, give any form of spiritual message. But her piercing look – not aimed at any person or object, but deeply indrawn – carried and conveyed a power which instantly transported one to a spiritual dimension. However, sometimes when anyone spoke to her, she would repeat *verbatim* the sentences used by the person – whatever be the language.

People who rarely visited Mayee Ma in the cold winter had the great opportunity of witnessing the divine lady walking deep into the Ocean and after some time coming out with an enormous amount of sea weeds adorning her whole body. She would then light them up (without any match sticks) and in the warmth of the fire would be seen totally absorbed in meditation and spiritual ecstasy.

Visitors to the Ashram at that time had spoken to me highly about this divine lady in Kanyakumari. Once, Yogi Ramsuratkumar spoke about her and asked me whether I had had *darshan* of her. While giving him a negative answer, I mentally offered homages to Mother Mayee Ma. I could not immediately visit her, even though Yogiji had kindled in my heart such a deep urge.

While totally involved in hectic Ashram activities, one day my close friend and fellow seeker, Ilaya Raaja – the ‘Music Wizard’ as he was and still is popularly known – and one who is totally devoted to Bhagavan Ramana, urged me to accompany him to Salem to have *darshan* of this ecstatic mystic lady of Kanyakumari. That was how I had the rare opportunity of having the Mother’s *darshan* and her blessings.

We both were very happy to sit still in Mayee Ma’s presence. Suddenly, I felt that her ‘look’ was directed at me. How can one describe the Mother’s penetrating, gracious glance of Grace? It reminded me, though, of the statement of the scriptures: “*Can one raise a fence around the blowing wind or imprison the vastness of the sky?*”

That fortunate day, when others -- including my friend Ilaya Raaja -- were otherwise occupied with errands; I was left alone with the Holy Mother. At that unique moment, though she was only looking on the vacant space as was her wont, suddenly, the holy Mother turned her attention on me, looked deeply into me and spoke to me very clearly:

“ Oh, *Arunachala Vaasi* (one residing at Arunachala) ! Be happy ! Stay there; and, everything will come to you! You are ever blessed!”

It was true!

I was at that moment, offering prayers in my heart to the Mother, fervently pleading to her to shower her Grace on me, bless me and thus guide to me in my journey within!

FOUR SUFI MYSTICS

The content of consciousness in every being created by God - the Higher Power - is the same in everyone. It is pure! It is *sunya*, empty! It is *poorna*, fullness! For, God created man in His own image. His image, Sages say, is the content of Consciousness, the '***I AM***'. This consciousness is the 'Life' given to us by Him. Another name for life according to the scriptures is *ananda*, happiness! The *Vedas* declare, "*Ananda* alone exists"!

The mystery of human living is so complex that the more one tries to unravel it, understand it logically, intellectually the greater the confusion, doubts, and non-understanding. The usual analogy cited is of a person caught in quicksand – the more forcefully one tries to come out of the mire, the deeper it sucks one in! Generally, the affected person is advised to wait and not struggle. To wait with an attitude of quietude is the true content of prayer. When one is in such a state of total surrender, help assuredly comes.

In the spiritual realm, help, in the form of guidance, rushes to the one who needs it, through the Grace of the *Guru*, or, Sages and Saints. When such guidance comes, the true seeker should be alert enough to recognize it and accept it, unconditionally.

In my life, such guidance arrived through four different Saints – strangely or not so very strangely, as anything can happen in a spiritual aspirant's life – all of them were *Sufi* Saints - ***Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Sufi Baba, a 'Mad' Muslim and Sai Mirchandani.***



Bawa Muhaiyaddeen

BAWA MUHAIYADDEEN



Life

Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen was a Sufi mystic. The name '*Muhaiyaddeen*' means '*giver of life to the true faith*'. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, true to his name, succeeded in awakening and strengthening peoples' faith in God.

Very little is known of his early life. Records indicate pilgrims while traveling through the jungles of Sri Lanka, caught glimpses of this holy man in the early 1900s. So overwhelmed were they by the depth of divinity and knowledge he imparted, that one devotee invited him to a nearby village. Thus, began his public life as a teacher. Though he was an unlettered man, people of different religions and from all walks of life came to him seeking wisdom.

He often referred to himself as an 'ant man', *i.e.*, a very small life in God's creation. According to an account from the 1940's, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen had spent time in Kataragama, a jungle shrine in the south of the island, and in Jailani, a cliff shrine dedicated to Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani of Baghdad. His association with that Shaikh indicates his connection to the *Qadiri* order of Sufism. Many of his followers who lived around the northern town of Jaffna were Hindus and addressed him as '*Swami*' or '*Guru*'. He often healed medical and spiritual illnesses, including cases of demonic possession.

In 1971, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen accepted an invitation from an American woman to visit Philadelphia. She had been corresponding with him after being introduced by a university student from Sri Lanka. She and her associates arranged for his travel to the United States

and for his stay in Philadelphia. People from all religious, social, and ethnic backgrounds came to hear him speak. By 1973, a group of his followers formed the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, which hosted a meeting house that offered several public meetings a week.

In May 1984, the mosque of Shaikh M. R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen was completed on the grounds of the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship. Thousands were touched by his wise words in his interviews on *Psychology Today*, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Pittsburgh Press*. Wherever he went, he tirelessly answered the many personal and mystical questions that people brought to him, until his death on December 8th, 1986.

The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship now serves as a thriving community dedicated to studying and disseminating the vast treasury of his teachings. Just south of the small city of Coatesville, is Bawa Muhaiyaddeen's mausoleum or *Mazar* in Chester County, Pennsylvania. It is a place of pilgrimage for Sufis and their Sheikhs, as well as Muslims and followers of other religions. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen established vegetarianism as the norm for the community and meat products are not permitted at the Fellowship Center in Philadelphia or at the Fellowship Farm.



‘ Mazar’ of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen at Chester County, Pennsylvania, USA



Sayings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen

(Breathing was supreme to his teaching. However, it is different from all other pranayamas - yogic breathing exercises)

“People pray daily three to five times to the Lord. One starts the prayer and completes the prayer. Thus, our prayers are limited. God is limitless - ஆதியும் இல்லை அந்தமும் இல்லை (No Beginning , no end). So how can one offer a prayer to the limitless through limitations ? . One has to breathe to live. Breathing has no limitations. If one prays along with breathing, the prayer too would be non-stop, without limitations. This is *dhikr* or *zikr* - a powerful form of devotion, chiefly associated with Sufism.”

“Every time when one breathes, one necessarily breathes out the gases that are used up and breathes in , the life-giving oxygen. Such cleansing takes place at every moment in everyone - all the time. Let prayer be associated with breathing. Thus, one should offer a prayer with every breath. Then, prayer becomes continuous and non-stop.”

“Breathe out through your left nostril - ‘Not I or I am not’ or ‘*La Ila Ha*’ or ‘I is an illusion’. Breathe in through your right nostril - ‘Only You are’ or ‘*Illa ILa Ha*’. In Tamil, ‘நான் இல்லை ; இருப்பது நீ ஒருவனே . உன்னை தவிர வேறு எவரும் இல்லை’. This is the highest form of prayer.”

“God has a home inside of our heart. We must find a home inside of God’s home inside of our heart.”

“The things that change are not our real life. Within us, there is another body, another beauty. It belongs to that ray of light which never changes. We must discover how to mingle

with it and become one with that unchanging thing. We must realize and understand this treasure of truth. That is why we have come to the world.”

“My children, very few people will accept the medicine of wisdom. The mind refuses wisdom. But if you do agree to accept it, you will receive the grace, and when you receive that grace, you will have good qualities. When you acquire good qualities, you will know true love, and when you accept love, you will see the light. When you accept the light, you will see the resplendence, and when you accept that resplendence, the wealth of three worlds will be complete within you. With this completeness, you will receive the Kingdom of God, and you will know your Father. When you see your Father, all your connections to *karma*, hunger, disease, old age will leave you.”

“My grandchildren, this is the way things really are. We must do everything with love in our hearts. God belongs to everyone. He has given a common wealth to all his creations, and we must not take it for ourselves. We must not take more than our share. Our hearts must melt with love, we must give lovingly to make others peaceful. Then we will win our true beauty and liberation of our soul. Please think about this. Prayer, the qualities of God, the action of God, faith in God and worship of God are your grace. If you have these, God will be yours and the wealth of the world to come will be yours. My grandchildren! Realize this in your lifetime. Consider your life, search for Wisdom, search for Knowledge, and search for that Love of God which is Divine Knowledge, and search for His qualities, His love, and His actions.”



Dhikr or Zikr : ‘La Ila Ha ‘ (‘NOT I or I am NOT’) ‘Illa ILa Ha’ (‘ONLY YOU ARE’)

BAWA AND ME



'Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship'

In the latter half of the 1960s perhaps, I got a call from Bangalore from one Dr. Ganesh of Sri Lanka. He said he would be coming to the Ashram *en route* to Chennai airport and that he is bringing a *Sufi Baba*. (While in Bombay, I often visited Haji Ali, the *samadhi shrine* of a Sufi Saint of that same name. I used to feel very happy there!) By evening, a car drove into the Ashram (a very rare incident in those days !) The car came up to the common guest room and I was very impressed to see a simple looking *Sufi Baba* with a profound spiritual aura.

I took him around Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi* shrine, which then was still incomplete, and then to the Old Hall. Bawa was silent all the while, though visibly moved to ecstasy in both places. He bent down and offered his obeisance to the Shrine while at the Old Hall he sat and meditated for a few minutes in total absorption. After that, I invited them both into the old office near the Ashram well and offered cow's milk which I had very specially arranged for them. Baba kept looking at me all the time - even as he sipped the milk.

After drinking the milk, he looked at me straight and then, in a melodious voice, said, "Though I came to pay my homage to Sri Bhagavan, I also have a message for you! Stay here. Don't go away anywhere searching for the Truth! 'Sri Bhagavan' is the Truth! 'Arunachala' is your Home! The Lord's blessings are on you fully!" Then, they went to the car and Bawa got inside - I didn't go near the car. The car started and suddenly stopped. Dr.Ganesh came out and almost ran towards me! In an emotional tone, he told me, "Bawa sent me to narrate to you what happened before coming to the Ashram. We were to go from Bangalore on the direct route to Chennai and then leave for USA, by flight via Bombay. When we entered the car, Bawa told me to take a *detour* to Tiruvannamalai - that's why I telephoned to you. When we reached Chengam, 20 miles from here, he stopped the car and told me, 'The manager of the Ashram to which we are going will not be there. His son will be there and I have a message to give him. He will offer milk to me - don't refuse it. (Bawa was not in the habit of eating outside.) Now, go and tell him he is a rare being and has many good things to do'," he added. That whole night I was swimming in the ocean of bliss!

In 1990, Yogi Ramsuratkumar commanded me to go abroad and give talks on Sri Bhagavan's 'Direct Teaching'. From then on, almost every year, he would give me the same instruction! I don't remember the year that I started staying at AHAM Center, Asheboro, North Carolina. Students of AHAM began to get attracted to the way of my communicating and sharing the Teaching with them.



During that time, one Shujaat Qayyum, a wonderful spiritual aspirant, staying at Tarrytown near New York, became very close to me. He often visited Bel Air (Maryland) where I spent a few weeks with Anuradha's son, Dr. Sankar and his family. A couple of times, Shujaat came and took me in his car from there to AHAM, North Carolina -- a seven-hour drive!

Shujaat Qayyum

Every time, he would suggest to me: "There is a '*Mazar*', the tomb of a Sufi Saint on the way. I go and meditate there quite often. I would like to take you there. You will love it." At least two or three times, I would have told him, "Next trip, we will go there...". The last time, perhaps in 2014, when I was travelling from Bel Air to New Jersey to give talks at house of Sri Bhagavan's devotee -- Nandini Kapadia -- , he was emphatic: "This time, I have an irresistible urge to take you there. I am positive that it is *Baba* who is inviting you there!" During that car journey, Shujaat asked me about how I got associated with Sufi Saints. I narrated in full detail about the *Sufi Baba* who visited me at the Ashram and how he had passed on an important message to me, decades back and how it was all taking place, now.



Nandini Kapadia

He then took a *detour* and reached a large tract filled with trees. He said this was the place. He became very emotional since he was very devoted to the Bawa and to his *Mazar*. I was still seated in the car while he rushed into the garden, assuring me he would read the notice board and come back. He returned and said, "This time, they have printed the picture of Bawa, too, on the notice board." I got interested as I am totally devoted to the bodily presence of Saints, Sages or to their pictures if they have dropped their bodies.

When I saw the notice board, I was thrilled! I almost shouted to Shujaat, "This is the same '*Sufi*' Saint who visited me at the Ashram in the 1960's and blessed me! See! His compassion! He has been inviting me to come to his *Mazar* all these years through you! This is the love and compassion of true Saints"! I went in, prostrated fully to the *Mazar* and offered my prayers and *pranams*, shedding profuse tears! "

The supreme climax (or should it be anti-climax of the episode?) is that neither Bawa Muhaiyaddeen nor Dr. Ganesh ever visited India! This was revealed to me by Shujaat. I was meditating inside the *Mazar* , when Shujaat brought me a leaflet on the life and teaching of Bawa wherein Bawa specifically states, "*I longed to be in India. But, I did not get an opportunity to do it!*"

Who then came to the Ashram? How had I been blessed by Bawa and his instructions! And now, how had he attracted me to his *Mazar* to bless me and assure me of his guidance? It was only a couple of years later that this mystery unraveled to reveal its mystic magic.



Bawa tending a Jackfruit tree at his Ashram in Sri Lanka

TAILPIECE

Anu Ma and I reached the United States by end of April, 2016. She accompanied me to the AHAM Center in Asheboro and arranged to make my three-month stay there comfortable. After twenty days, she left to be with her son and his family in Maryland after entrusting the responsibility of taking care of me to Kumaravel and his wife Gayatri Devi, both devout devotees of Sri Bhagavan.

As this project, '**Meetings with Sages and Saints**', was entrusted to Anuradha, we discussed threadbare the entire content of these twenty or more articles on the Sages



Kumaravel and Gayatri Devi

during those twenty days. When it came to Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, she pragmatically suggested that we visit Philadelphia and get the mystical aspects of Bawa's visit to Sri Ramanasramam confirmed, as Dr. Ganesh the person who had accompanied Bawa there, was still alive and active!

After completing twelve talks on twelve Sages and Saints, I returned to Bel Air, Maryland, *en route* to Arunachala. While there, a devout couple, Valapet Badri and his wife Hema, came and volunteered to take us to Philadelphia. They contacted Dr. Ganesh and we all went to Philadelphia. Dr. Ganesh and his wife were exceptionally kind. To a query by Anuradha, Mrs. Ganesh answered, "We are very happy that Bawa and my husband went to Sri Ramanasramam and guided our Ganesanji. We do not find this strange! Bawa has done the same for devotees living in China, Sri Lanka, Phillipines and other countries, while living with us and giving talks here at Philadelphia!" Mrs. Ganesh then delightedly recalled the story of a child who was sick in China. "The people in China claimed Bawa visited them while Bawa was still in America. When asked, Bawa said, 'I had to go to China to perform a surgery on the child!' There are many dimensions in the spiritual field and assuming a psychic body to guide devotees is very rare. Bawa's special mission seemed to be to dwell in such psychic realms, only to help the needy!"



Hema and Valapet Badri

Dr. Ganesh affectionately recalled what Bawa once told him:



Dr. Ganesh at Philadelphia

"According to the science energy comes from food. Look at the potato plant. It draws energy from 'somewhere' to make that potato. But brothers, you go to the store, buy the potato, clean the potato, cook, eat and digest it. Until you become like that potato plant when you know how to draw energy from 'somewhere', you have to continue to go to the store, buy it cook it and eat it - what a wasteful and lengthy process ! "

After narrating this, he gave us an excellent lunch. Then we were taken to Bawa's *Mazar* - half an hour drive from Philadelphia. There, the Sufi Saint's *Samadhi* Shrine brims with peace, quietude and silence.

We returned to Maryland, with a happy, overflowing heart!

‘MAD’ MUSLIM

“ஆண்டி பெருத்தது அண்ணாமலை” or “*Sadhus* abound in Arunachala,” is a famous saying prevalent in Tiruvannamalai. Another aspect is also equally true. There have always been many ‘mad’ persons in Arunachala. Yes, Arunachala is always filled with ‘sane’ *sadhus* and ‘insane’ mad persons! A true *sadhaka* should not look at this undeniable fact only from the physical point of view and pass judgement. Sri Bhagavan made two statements which have relevance here: “எந்த புத்திலே எந்த பாம்பு இருக்குமோ ? யாருக்குத் தெரியும்!” (“Which snake-pit houses which snake - who can know for sure?”)

“வெகு தூரத்திலேந்து மஹான்கள் அருணாசல ப்ரதக்ஷிணம் செய்ய வருவா ! ஜனங்களிடமிருந்து தப்பிக்க, அதில் சிலர் போட்டுக்கொள்ளும் வேஷம் : ‘சாது’ அல்லது ‘பைத்தியக்காரன்’ !” (“All the time, Realized Beings visit ‘Arunachala’ for the sole purpose of doing *giri pradakshina* (circumambulation of the Holy Hill). To escape drawing attention from the crowds of people, the two safe disguises they themselves adorn are that of ‘*sadhus*’ and mad persons!”)

In the 1980s, after the birth centenary celebrations of Sri Bhagavan, the activities of the Ashram burgeoned. Being an important part of the management, I became engaged all the time in arranging functions not only within the premises of the Ashram but also across India. I travelled extensively to help other organizations celebrate Sri Bhagavan’s Birth Centenary. I was too busy to pay attention to my *sadhana*. *Guru-seva* took precedence over *Guru-upadesa*. I didn’t know how to extricate myself from being engaged in the continuous organizational activities and tours.

There was a ‘mad’ Muslim at that time in the town. Day and night, he would walk the streets, continuously using abusive language. People used to hurl stones at him, beat him with sticks and drive him away without fear of retaliation. Because, he never reacted nor retorted. In fact, he never even looked at them. Occasionally, he would come to the Ashram and demand food through gestures – all the while continuing to shout abusively. Every time he crossed me, he would give me a piercing look, which kindled in my Heart a sense of sympathy and love for him and never a feeling of dislike or anger.

One day, he begged me through gestures to let him into the Dining Hall and have food. Since he was dirty and smelly, even servants refused to eat along with him. With a rush of compassion, I assured him of a sumptuous meal if he followed me. I made him sit outside the Old Hall, spread a big banana leaf, and brought some buckets full of rice, vegetables, *sambhar*, *rasam* and butter-milk. He looked very happy, though he still mouthed abusive words. He ate with relish all the buckets full of food and demanded water. That bucket of water too he swallowed. It was an impossible feat! I knew something remarkable was happening. After finishing, he gave me his usual piercing look. But this time, it was long and filled with love. His abusive outpouring, stopped abruptly. To my utter surprise, he told me in clear Tamil, “உனக்காக ஒரு கோடி ரூபா காத்திண்டிருக்கு. ஒரு ரூபாவை நாடி, தேடி, ஓடி, அதுவுங்கிடைக்காம ஏமாந்து போகாதே” – (“A crore (ten million) of rupees is waiting for you! Don’t commit the grave mistake of running around all over the world for gaining just one rupee! And, finally get heart-broken by getting not even that!”). He repeated these words three times and went away. I was in a state of ecstasy!

Next day, our servants reported to me that the ‘mad’ Muslim that I had fed the previous day, was lying dead, near a tank right by the side of entrance to the Big Temple!

My attention on ‘life’ took a complete ‘U’-turn from then on. It turned from attending to external activities to focusing my attention exclusively ‘inwards’ to practising Sri Bhagavan’s teaching of Self-Enquiry!



“.....by the side of entrance to the Big Temple.....”

‘SUFI BABA’ OF HYDERABAD

Robert Adams was living at Sedona, in Arizona, U.S.A., giving *sat sangh*. Fortunately, American spiritual aspirants began recognizing him as a true spiritual teacher and started basking themselves in his spiritual presence.

Every year, Robert would invite me and Anuradha to come to Sedona and stay with him. He would arrange accommodation for us with other American residents there. That year when I was staying at the KFI, Rajghat, Varanasi, I got a telephone call from dear Robert and he requested me to stay in Sedona for three months, without fail; and, I had agreed to it. When I returned to Arunachala from Varanasi, a signed letter from Robert was waiting for me. The contents were the same : “ You should spend three months at Sedona”. However, when myself and Anuradha reached San Francisco, we were informed that that very day Robert had dropped his body at Sedona ! Yet, I persisted with my insistence that as I had given an assurance to Sage Robert that I would obey his commandment, I would go to Sedona and spend three months. When we reached Sedona, the devotees of Robert Adams requested me to conduct *sat sangh*, as they were missing the sacred *sat sangh* of beloved Robert. I obeyed. (For more details see ‘Ramana Periya Puranam’.)

One day our hosts said that one ‘*Sufi Baba*’ from India had come to Sedona and was keen to meet me. The Sufi Baba had always a fascinated crowd around him wherever he went – whether in India or in USA!

Anuradha and I were busy spending time in *sat sangh* with the eagerly listening devotees of dear Robert. Anuradha’s son Sankar (now, Dr. Sankar J. Kausik is a Urology Surgeon in Bel Air, Maryland, USA) had also come there to be with us. Our hosts took the three of us one night to a residence where the Sufi Baba was giving a demonstration of ‘*Sufi Dance*’.

That was how I met the Sufi Baba. He was singing and dancing in a fascinating manner. Almost everyone joined in the group dancing. Sufi Baba would sit down for some time while others danced.

Suddenly, he got up, came to me, pulled me up and started dancing along with me. That was the first and last time I think I have danced! Anuradha, herself a good dancer, later said that I danced very well - almost matching with the Baba in all the measured steps of the typical Sufi Dance! As for me, I didn't know anything!

The next day, he invited us to the house where he was staying. He was exceptionally kind to Sankar, Anuradha and me. Suddenly, he pulled me close to him, looked affectionately yet powerfully into my eyes and said:

“Ganesan! I came this time all the way to America exclusively to meet you. In fact, I went to Arunachala to meet you at the Ashram. Since you were not there, the people there asked me to tell them what I had to tell you. I refused, as my sole purpose was to communicate an important ‘message’ directly to you. Ganesan! Now, I have caught you. The ‘message’ is, never leave Arunachala to stay away from it for doing *sadhana*. Arunachala is your place of penance. Some forces will disturb you. My ‘Beloved’ has therefore sent me to forewarn and steady you. Listen to my words, ‘Arunachala is the place for gaining your spiritual emancipation’. I bless you, Ganesan! Be steady! Be happy!”

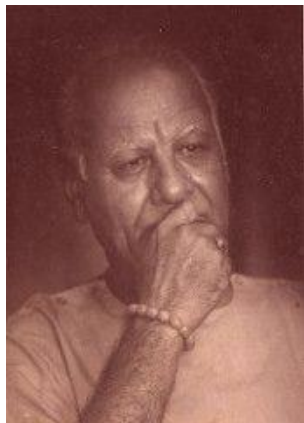
I assured him that I would obey his commandment.

Very soon, situations at Sri Ramanasramam changed drastically, forcing me to become fickle-minded with a strange desire to run away from Arunachala and settle as a beggar on the banks of River Ganges, my *Ganga Mata*! But, the Sufi Baba's words of guidance and my assurance to him that I would not move out of Arunachala became of paramount importance!

Spiritual guidance extended to aspirants by Sages and Saints is undeniably available even today; and, at all times.

All that an aspirant needs are ‘*eyes to see and ears to hear*’ !

SAI MIRCHANDANI



Life

Baba Sai Mirchandani was a living saint in the line of Sufi Saints known as the 'Masters of *Shah Daraz*'. Sai Mirchandani's *Guru*, Baba Sai Giani, told him once, "Mangha, Beware! You will be beheaded, but we will restore the head again. Do not be afraid, you will conquer death!"

Baba Sai Giani came to Bombay and stayed with his brother at Matunga. It was here that Sai Mirchandani met him for the first time. Being a good singer, he pleased Sai Giani with his melodious voice. On the third day of Sai Giani's second visit, Sai Mirchandani caught the hem of Sai Giani's *kurta* (shirt) and asked if he was leaving him. Sai Giani graciously replied that he would never leave him. As Sai Mirchandani looked round, he saw the picture of Sai Giani on his finger nails, toe nails, within himself and wherever he turned his eyes. This was an extraordinary experience! He saw light travelling throughout his body like an electric current with a form as distinct as his own. He began saying: "*Bhagavan aaya hai!*" ("God has come") and "I have become Him". The people around, saw a glow on his face and bowed down to him. Twelve years later, in 1949 at Baroda, the master revealed to Sai Mirchandani the state of ultimate Reality. Sai Mirchandani adored Sri Bhagavan.

SAI MIRCHANDANI AND ME

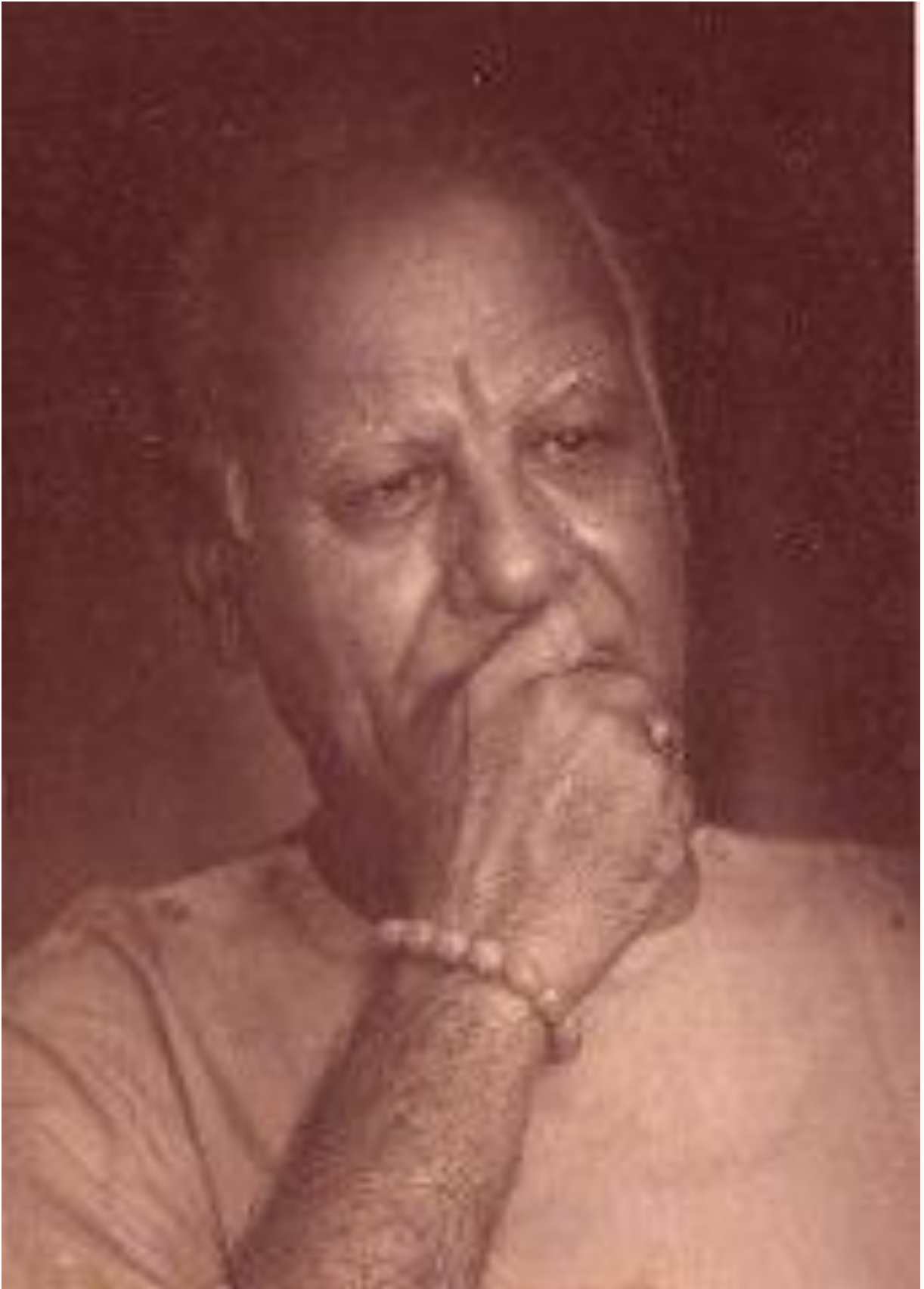
During one of my trips to Bombay in the 1970s to seek advertisements from firms for “***The Mountain Path***”, I went to see Mr. Sinha, the General Manager of a reputed company. He received me cordially and asked me the purpose of my visit. I told him about my purpose. He replied without hesitation, “Granted! Don’t worry over the release of advertisement. It will be sent to you promptly. I want you now to tell me about Sri Ramana Maharshi and his unique teaching.”

Seeing the deep enthusiasm of Mr. Sinha, I began explaining to him in depth the significance of Sri Bhagavan’s “Death Experience” at the tender age of sixteen. He listened very attentively and said he wanted to spend more time in *sat sangh* with me. He added that he was going that evening to a Sufi Saint living on Mount Pleasant Road and that he wanted me to accompany him. He picked me up from Juhu, where I was staying with my brother Mani and his family. On the way, he gave me details about the Sufi mystic.

On arriving at his residence, Sai Mirchandani, a tall figure adorning a long *kurta* welcomed me with a hearty hug. It was late in the evening and it was time for his dinner. Sai invited me to have dinner with him and about ten of his disciples. I was hesitant as I presumed that the fare was non-vegetarian, to which I was averse. Seeing my hesitation, Sai reassured me “Don’t worry! It is pure vegetarian food!”

After dinner, he asked me about Sri Bhagavan’s approach to *Bhakti*, love, and surrender. I narrated to him about the deep *Bhakti* Sri Bhagavan had for his *Guru*, **Arunachala**, and how he had expressed it by writing hundreds of extempore verses of adoration. Being a Sufi, Sai was moved to tears of ecstasy. He embraced me again. There was a great aura around him and his words were as sweet as nectar - I became his admirer, instantly.

He then expressed his true happiness in meeting me - a sincere seeker with deep spiritual aspirations. He pleaded with me to make further efforts to gain the blessings of great *Mahatmas*, asserting, “Only the Grace and Blessings of *Mahatmas* can make the ‘journey within’ smoother, unobstructed, and crown it with success.”



Sai Mirchandani

He added, “The *Kumbha Mela* will soon be conducted at Hardwar. You should go there. *Mahatmas*, who roam naked in the Himalayas for hundreds of years, will come to participate in it. I want you to receive their Grace and Blessings!”

Though I was thrilled to receive this direct and practical spiritual guidance from Sai, I also felt diffident as there was no way for me to discern who was a *Mahatma* and who wasn't. For instance, I might mistake a clever fraud disguised as a Saint to be the real thing and a true Saint staying knee-deep in a drain to be a lunatic! So, how could I correctly judge and seek a Saint's blessings?

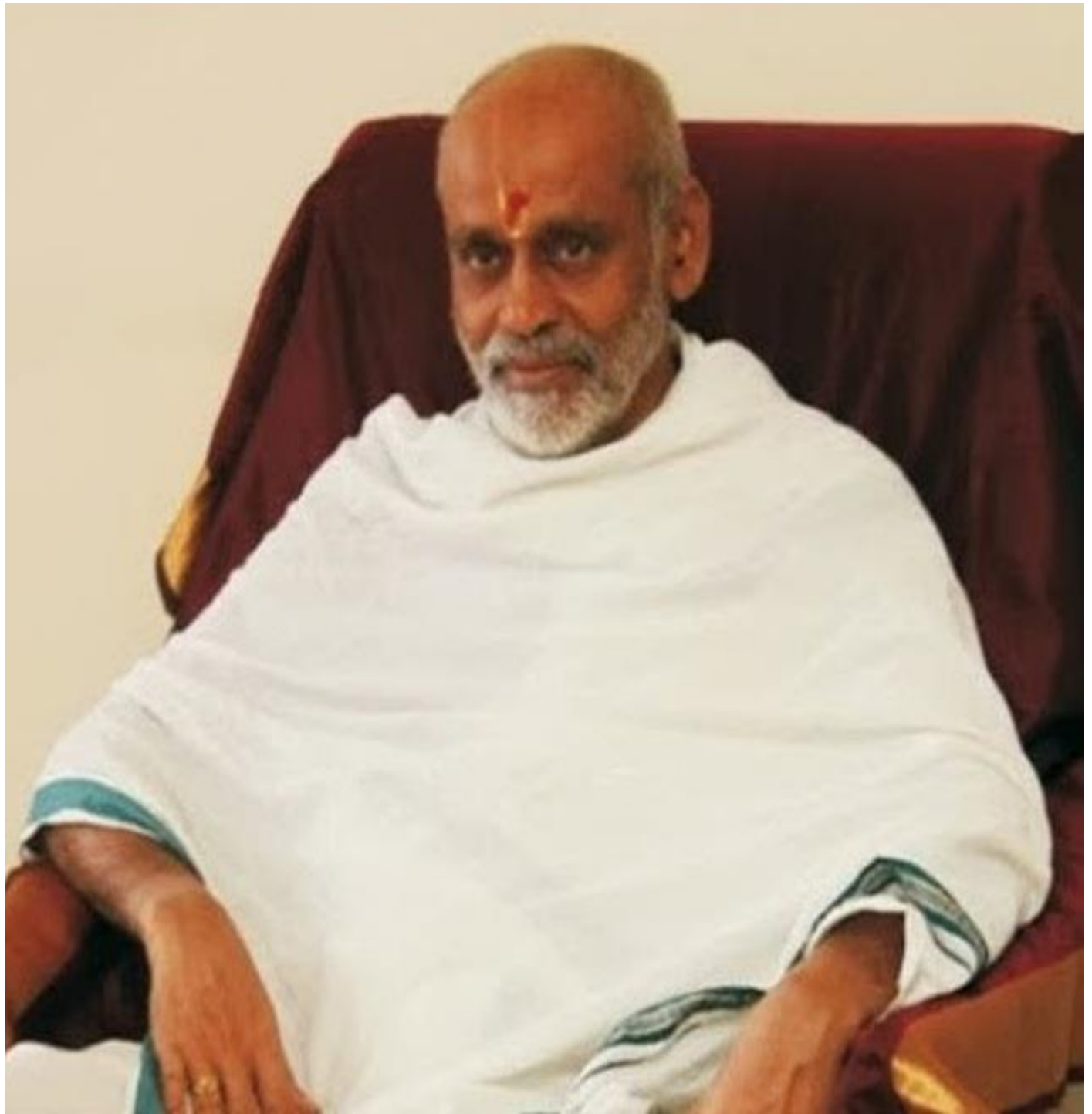
Reading my thoughts, Sai thundered at me, “Did I not instruct you only go to the *Kumbha Mela*? Did I tell you to go in search of Sages? Roam about amidst the huge crowds there. Walk hither and thither. You need not identify anyone as a Saint. Indeed, you *cannot* identify them. They, on the other hand, will recognise you as a true spiritual aspirant and shower Grace, Guidance and Blessings on you - something which is almost impossible to gain through your own effort”.

I was thrilled to hear Sai Mirchandani's glorious words of assurance which abided in me throughout my life !

A 'praying heart' knows no boundaries of limitations! Inculcate a deep longing within your heart for gaining Emancipation, through an attitude of 'love' and 'surrender'. Then, Grace and Blessings will be showered on you, will flood you, and sweep you to the heights of Total Freedom!

'Kumbha Mela' at Haridwar: millions of Hindus offer worship to Ganga Mata





KRISHNA PREMI SWAMI (SRI SRI ANNA)



Life

Krishna Premi Swami, fondly addressed as '*Sri Sri Anna*' was born in Chenganoor, a small village on the banks of River Manniar in Tamil Nadu, to the devout couple Venkatarama Sastri and Parvathi Ammal. Born on Lord Krishna's *Janmashtami* (birthday) on 31st August, 1934, he was named 'Ramakrishnan'. But, every one fondly called him '*Ambi*'. Later, as he grew up he was called *Sri Sri Anna*.

From a very young age, Sri Sri Anna demonstrated a prodigious and fluent knowledge of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas*. He detested regular school, and ran away home after his first week there. He was then left under the tutelage of a learned *Vedic* scholar by his father around the age of seven. One day, this scholar asked him to repeat a portion of the *Vedas*, but Sri Sri Anna stopped after one of the sentences. When asked why he had stopped, Sri Sri Anna replied that one of the sentences had been left out as he was following the meaning of the *mantra*. The teacher was astounded at the ability of the young lad to understand and follow the esoteric meaning of the *Vedic* text. When his father arrived the next day, the teacher remarked, "My teaching your son is merely a formality, as he is already omniscient." True to that prediction, Sri Sri Anna soon mastered all the scriptures and started composing commentaries on them in Sanskrit.

During his childhood, he received a text-book on the *Upanishads* from a pious *Brahmin* priest. In it, he found a photo of *Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* with his name printed underneath it. He would gaze upon the smiling photo of the Maharshi and go into a state of silent ecstasy. From then on, he had very deep love and reverence for the Maharshi.

Equally evident to those who witnessed and recorded his childhood, was the divine nature and qualities of the young boy. He had an intense longing for God and spent many

hours in solitude and meditation. He had mystical communions with saints like, Tulsidas, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and Bhodendra Swami - which strengthened his steadfastness. He had *darshan* of Lord Krishna along with His consort Radha. This conferred on him a deeper mystical communion: He lost normal consciousness for three days and pined for Sri Krishna as Radha would, even manifesting feminine qualities. After this experience, he became convinced that his mission was to reveal to the world that the path to attain the lotus feet of Lord Krishna was through '*Bhakti*'.

Around 1957, Sri Sri Anna visited a small drought-affected village near Tirukoilur, called Paranur. Despite it being a poor, remote area, Sri Sri Anna was struck by the depth of devotion of its villagers and intuitively felt connected with the village. He started visiting it more often and finally settled down there. The village got transformed into a haven of devotion – a veritable "*Brindavan*" itself. He conducted '*Srimad Bhagavatha Saptaham*' (reading and discoursing on the text '*Srimad Bhagavatham*' for seven days) regularly.



'Bhakta Kolahalan'

Another remarkable incident took place during that period while Sri Sri Anna was in Paranur. A beautiful idol of Lord Krishna, which was originally found on the banks of the River Yamuna by a saint from Gujarat, was under the care of a businessman in Kumbakonam. Sri Sri Anna had a vision of that beautiful idol. He visited the businessman and asked him to give him the idol and was met with refusal. However, that night, Lord Krishna appeared in the dream of the businessman and directed him to hand it over to Sri Sri Anna. The very next day, the businessman

reverentially handed over the idol to Sri Sri Anna. Sri Krishna was given the divine name '*Bhakta Kolahalan*'. A temple was raised in Paranur and Sri Sri Anna himself performed daily *puja* to it. Like the musical Saints of the lore, Sri Sri Anna started composing songs on '*Kolahalan*'; and nearly a thousand songs have been composed to date!

While in Paranur, Lord Krishna appeared to Sri Sri Anna in his dream and instructed him to marry Madhurambal who lived in Paranur. Initially, Sri Sri Anna was hesitant as he felt the life of a householder would be a distraction to his mission, but another saintly person, Vasudeva Brahmam, for whom Sri Sri Anna had great regard, had a similar vision while offering prayers to Lord Venkateswara at Tirupati. Sri Sri Anna consented and the marriage was performed. Madhurambal is addressed with reverence as '*Manni*', by all the devotees of Sri Sri Anna. His words to Manni gives a glimpse into the true purport of his acceding to become a householder.

Sri Sri Anna: “This is the first night since our marriage that we are both alone. The full moon is adorning the entire Universe with its silver rays. The stars are glittering as pearls. The world is asleep. We should not be like the people of the world. If we while away our time by just eating, sleeping, and engaging in sense pleasures, there will be no time to pursue the Truth. To know and realise the Absolute Truth – the Supreme Power – that is behind this inert Universe, is what we should strive for. Unless one’s life is spent for this, one’s very birth becomes a waste”.

“Due to the merits of umpteen births, we have become servants of our Lord Krishna. By living an ideal life of serving the Lord, both of us should reach the Lord’s Sacred Feet, together. This must be our aim.”

One of the first sacred places that he visited with Manni after their marriage was Arunachala. Sri Sri Anna climbed up the holy hill, along with Manni and seated on the rock outside Virupaksha Cave, gave specific spiritual instructions to her. Then, climbing down the hill to Sri Ramanasramam, he walked into the bookstore. Upon opening a book there, he found the same *upadesa* given by Bhagavan Ramana to his mother, Alagammal. Showing it to Manni, he remarked, “See, it is all written here:”

‘The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their Prarabdha karma. Whatever is destined not to happen, will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.’”

Sri Sri Anna felt his mission was to spread *bhakti* in India. To that end, he has travelled countless times from the southernmost point Kanyakumari to the north in the Himalayas, giving talks on and spreading *Bhagavatha Dharma* (traditional virtues). In addition to his tireless travels, he has composed nearly 40,000 verses in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi. According to his devotees, only the ancient Sage Veda Vyasa has composed more verses in Sanskrit !

Sri Sri Anna has also renovated many dilapidated temples and established trust funds to help maintain them. He founded ashrams in several parts of India, to spread *Bhakti*, giving total importance to ‘*Nama Sankirtana*’ (singing and dancing in ecstasy).

Despite being 82 years old now, Sri Sri Anna remains active and ceaselessly working. He continues to travel across the country, giving discourses on ‘*Srimad Bhagavatham*’. He says that his mission is to continue with discourses as long as he can.

Sri Sri Anna’s scintillating ‘Majestic Voice’ is surcharged with spiritual power that transforms the devotees to a state of spiritual ecstasy !



*Flower-offerings to Sri Sri Anna in Kanyakumari
(standing behind Sri Sri Anna is Gnanagiri Ganesan)*

SRI SRI ANNA AND ME

EKADASI – 1

‘Vaishnava Ekadasi’, (the 11th day after Full Moon and New Moon) started playing a special role in my life ! At Sri Ramanasramam, we gave monthly importance only to *Masa Sivaratri*, because of the *pradosha puja* to Lord Shiva. Suddenly, the days dedicated to Lord Vishnu, every month, started becoming important to me! When I mentioned this to Kanakamma, she smiled and exclaimed, “*Saivam Muththinaa Vaishnavam.*” (“When devotion to Lord Shiva ripens, it lands one in devotion to Lord Vishnu.”)

At that time, I was at Tiruchuzhi, the birth place of Sri Bhagavan, undergoing nature cure treatment that entailed fasting and total rest. Anuradha accompanied me. In that nature care centre, named after Sri Bhagavan, we were given a small hut each, with a bed where one is supposed to be most of the time totally resting – no bathing, eating, talking and if possible, no thinking – complete silence -- merely staying still – ‘Summaa Iruttal’ !

We completed the first three days of fasting with difficulty. Two days after that, there was ‘feasting’ – albeit only on soups and steamed vegetables, in restricted quantities! Another round of three days of fasting was going to commence, when Swami Ananthananda most cheerfully announced that our *Ekadasi* round was starting! We had good *sat sangh* with Swami Ananthananda who was running that institute. He too loved Sages and Saints.

Our good friend, Gnanagiri Ganesan from Sivakasi arrived to have *sadhus darshan* and brought along with him a cassette player and tapes containing spiritual discourses of Krishna Premi Swami, who is fondly addressed as *Sri Sri Anna*! He said that he always listened to Sri Sri Anna’s tapes on all *Ekadasi* days. Gnanagiri Ganesan, Anu Ma and I started listening to the first tape titled: “*Madras Bhagavatham*”. The entire side of ‘A’ of the tape was like a commentary on Sri Bhagavan’s ‘*Who am I ?*’ We listened very intently - the narration was breath-taking! Anu Ma and myself uttered at the same time: “It feels like Sage Sukha himself is narrating ! ”



L to r : Smt.Narmada,Swami Ananthananda,VG,Smt.Chitra - in front of Tiruchuli temple

Swami Ananthananda came in to suggest to us that we all better rest; but, stayed back to listen to the *Bhagavatham*. His assistants, Chithra and Narmada, who came in to give us *pranic* healing too stayed back to listen. The space inside the hut was fully packed by the afternoon! The recognition came that we were not going to take rest from our listening to the tapes. So, one more cot was placed in the corner of the room for Anu Ma. The subsequent three days of fasting flew by like three minutes! We had no idea that the contents of ‘*Bhagavatham*’ could be so *Vedantic* and *Advaitic*!

We continued to listen to Sri Sri Anna’s remarkable expositions with deep dedication and total absorption. ‘*Srimad Bhagavatham*’ touched the core of our Hearts, with its richness of *Vedantic* truth. His *Ramayanam* meanwhile, melted our hearts to sink into the Self. His hilarious narration of *Mahabharatham* made us laugh to the hilt. His talks on *Bhagavad Gita* were so highly evolved in its content that we were wondering to whom Sri Sri Anna was delivering such an invaluable treasure!

We had planned to stay for only fifteen days. But, we went on to stay in a trance for thirty-three days, as we felt we were thoroughly being blessed by the ‘Sacred Voice’ of Krishna Premi Swami !

EKADASI – 2

Back at Sri Ramanasramam, a lot of work was pending and as such we were buried in it for a few months. One fine morning, Swami Ananthananda arrived at our Ashram from Tiruchuzhi along with the auditor Gopalakrishnan and insisted that we take him to Tirukoilur, 20 miles from Arunachala, to show him the sacred places where Sri Bhagavan had got His *gyoti darshan*, his meal from the temple drummer and the house where he had pledged his ear-rings. We went along with them in their car.

After showing Swami Ananthananda all the places hallowed by Sri Bhagavan in that temple city and while we were preparing to return to Arunachala, the Swami was suddenly attracted to the tall, majestic towers of the *Ulagalandha Perumal* temple in the centre of the town. All of us went in and stood in the presence of the huge, imposing idol of Lord Vishnu standing with his right foot lifted up to the sky. It was a divine and moving sight! The priest who did the *puja* to the Lord on our behalf, held the *aarti* plate in front of us and enquired whether we had come to have *darshan* of Sri Sri Anna. As we looked askance at him, he explained that devout devotees travelling to see Krishna Premi Swami on *Dasami* night, stopped in the temple and then went on to spend *Ekadasi* with Sri Sri Anna.

It was then that we realised that the priest was talking about the ‘Sacred Voice’ we were all listening to in Tiruchuzhi! He said the village, Paranur where Sri Sri Anna lived, was only eleven kilometres from Tirukoilur. It was a very pleasant surprise to know that the Saint lived so close to where we were! I firmly believe to this day, that it was the Lord *Ulagalandha Perumal* who directed us to Sri Sri Anna’s presence on that day!

The road that led us from Tirukoilur to Paranur village was a mud bund. In the twilight, we felt we were ‘crossing the seven hills and the seas’ to reach there! On entering the village, we felt as if we had also crossed over several centuries into a hoary past, into the ancient times of *Vedic Rishis*! A pious man was seated on a raised platform of a small temple, and in front of him sat devout men and women, facing him. All of them were chanting ‘*Vishnu Sahasranamam*’ (the Litany of 1008 holy Names of Lord Vishnu). It felt like ‘Eternity frozen into a moment’ !

After all the devotees went away for dinner, Swami Ananthananda introduced me to Sri Sri Anna, the man seated on the raised platform, as Bhagavan Ramana’s grand-nephew. Sri Sri Anna gave a most gracious nod of his head in welcome. I asked him if he had seen Sri Bhagavan. He answered, “If there was one person on earth whom I wanted to see, it was Sri Bhagavan. But, I was not able to do it, as I was still a dependent on others and lived far

away from Arunachala.” He said he was about 8 or 9 years old when he was presented with a book on the *Upanishads* in which he saw a picture of Sri Bhagavan with his name. He added, “Every time when the *Upanishad* revealed an aspect of Truth to me, I would turn the pages and look at Sri Bhagavan’s picture. It would confirm and establish me in that state of Truth.” He talked to the four of us about Sri Bhagavan and his glory for thirty minutes and concluded, “What is the wonder if Sri Bhagavan gave his state to *pundits* like Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni or Jagadeesa Sastri ! What is remarkable is that he granted that state even to the dogs Chinna Karuppan and Jackie!”

After listening to this enthralling story, we were prepared to leave. Sri Sri Anna insisted that we return for *Ekadasi* celebrations the next day. We did. We witnessed his tireless nature that started at four in the morning and continued unabated until eleven at night! The day included activities of singing, prayer, *puja*, dancing, and a divine lecture. On that day, an old devotee of Sri Sri Anna had completed reading the great epic *Ramayana* for the 100th time. To honour and celebrate it, Sri Sri Anna decorated the idol of Sri Krishna to look like Lord Rama (with bow and arrows in His hands). He observed the whole day as an adoration of Lord Rama. As a special offering to Lord Rama, he delivered an inspiring talk on ‘*Rama Hridayam*’ – the Sacred Heart of Lord Rama. Every event was scintillating and elevating!

Sri Sri Anna asked me, at the end, “Did you enjoy the decorations and *pujas* to the Lord, with all its grandeur?” I replied, “I enjoyed only your dedication and devotion to the Lord. In the process, I did not notice Him at all. I was absorbed in looking at you!” Sri Sri Anna blessed me with a gracious smile, “Yes! Do that alone; and, always!” Even after many years, every time I am in his presence, he insists that I sit close to him and be looking at him! A true blessing, indeed!

A few months later, Sri Sri Anna commanded us to follow him on his *Sapthaham* pilgrimages all over India – Chennai, Kadayanallur, Rameswaram, Tiruppullani, Kanyakumari, Bangalore, Kashi, Haridwar, Sukhatal, Brindavan, Mathura, Delhi, Senganoor, Kumbakonam, Sivakasi, Nava Tirupati (nine Lord Vishnu temples), Govindapuram, etc. Until then, I had not done any such extended pilgrimage. This was a new spiritual experience for me - to go with a Saint to places of religious and spiritual importance and have the greatness of each place expounded and explained by him either through a public talk or in a private conversation. Never had I visited so many pilgrim centres, worshipped at so many old temples, or had dips in so many sacred rivers!



“.....would walk slowly down the street to beg for ‘unchavritti’.....”

EKADASI – 3

Almost every *Ekadasi* from then on, we went to Paranur to be with Sri Sri Anna. He was exceptionally kind to us and would spend a long time alone with us. On those occasions, Sri Sri Anna would voluntarily narrate to us the spiritual experiences he had during his earlier days. Every time we took leave of him, he would fondly say, “Let us meet often!” [“அடிக்கடி சந்திப்போம்”] Only on our first trip, we stayed overnight for *Dwadasi* and attended all the religious activities.

Dwadasi was always less crowded and since Sri Sri Anna had fasted the whole of the eleventh day, *Ekadasi*, his lunch was very early. On the morning of *Dwadasi*, he would walk

slowly down the whole street – from house to house – followed by the singers singing his compositions on Lord Krishna, to beg for ‘*unchchavritti*’ - food for him and his family’s daily living – rice, *dal* and a few coins.

We formulated a routine of visits to Paranur either on *Ekadasi* afternoons for his evening talk or in the early morning on the next day for witnessing the *unchchavritti* on *Dwadasi*.

That day, it was a very crowded *Ekadasi*. So, we could not enjoy the special privilege of free access to Sri Sri Anna. However, we utilised the ‘missed’ opportunity by enjoying a long narration on Sri Sri Anna by his long standing and ardent lawyer-devotee, Kuppuswami Iyer. He freely shared with us some of his early experiences with Sri Sri Anna:

“*Pravachanam*s (discourses) in those days meant seven days of total dedication to *Srimad Bhagavatham*. Sri Sri Anna was Sage Sukha and all of us were Parikshit. He would do *parayanam* of *Bhagavatham* from 7 to 9 in the morning and then, without giving a gap, he would narrate the story and clarify its nuances up to 12 noon. After lunch and a little rest until 3 p.m., he would again continue the *pravachanam* until 5. After giving a gap of two hours for performing the evening ablutions and having dinner, he would commence his discourse at 7 p.m. and continue until 1 or 2 in the morning. At 5 a.m. he would himself do the *puja* to the idol of the Lord. That is how he treated his body and also taught others in those days! By the time it all ended on the seventh day, the whole village or town would be so ecstatic with *Bhagavatham* that they would feel as if they were literally living with Lord Krishna!



Kuppuswami Iyer

“Once, there was a *pravachanam* at Coimbatore. A mill owner had invited him to give discourses on *Bhagavatham*. He had also instructed his workmen at the factory to attend the *pravachanam* for a few minutes, since he wanted some sizeable audience to be present, at least to start with. In the normal course, the workers would not have stayed beyond ten or fifteen minutes. But, they could not move away as they were all literally enchanted by the story of Sri Krishna. The following day, the workers told the mill owner that they would work overtime and compensate the time they attended the *pravachanam*! Sri Sri Anna could relate to any kind of crowd.

“On the third day, moved by the workers’ love for Sri Sri Anna, the mill owner garlanded him and presented him with a tray of clothes and coins, at the beginning of the narration. Sri Sri Anna did not notice what was in the tray initially. But when he looked pointedly at it, he saw the gold coins. Uncontrollable sadness and anger overpowered Sri

Sri Anna. He tried to get over it by reciting *dhyana slokas*, in addition to five or six verses from the text. But nothing could contain his emotion. He stood up and declared, ‘Today, I have sold my *Bhagavatham*. As such, it refuses to come out from my Heart!’ Coming down the dais, he told one of his students to continue the narration of the story and then walked out through the back door of the mill, stood in front of a provision shop and begged for money to go back to Paranur. A devotee ran after him, caught up with him, took him to the bus stop and put him on a bus to Paranur. Next day, the mill owner went to Paranur and begged him for forgiveness. Sri Sri Anna smilingly said, ‘You didn’t do anything wrong. My *Kitta* (Sri Krishna) called me urgently, so I had to come away!’

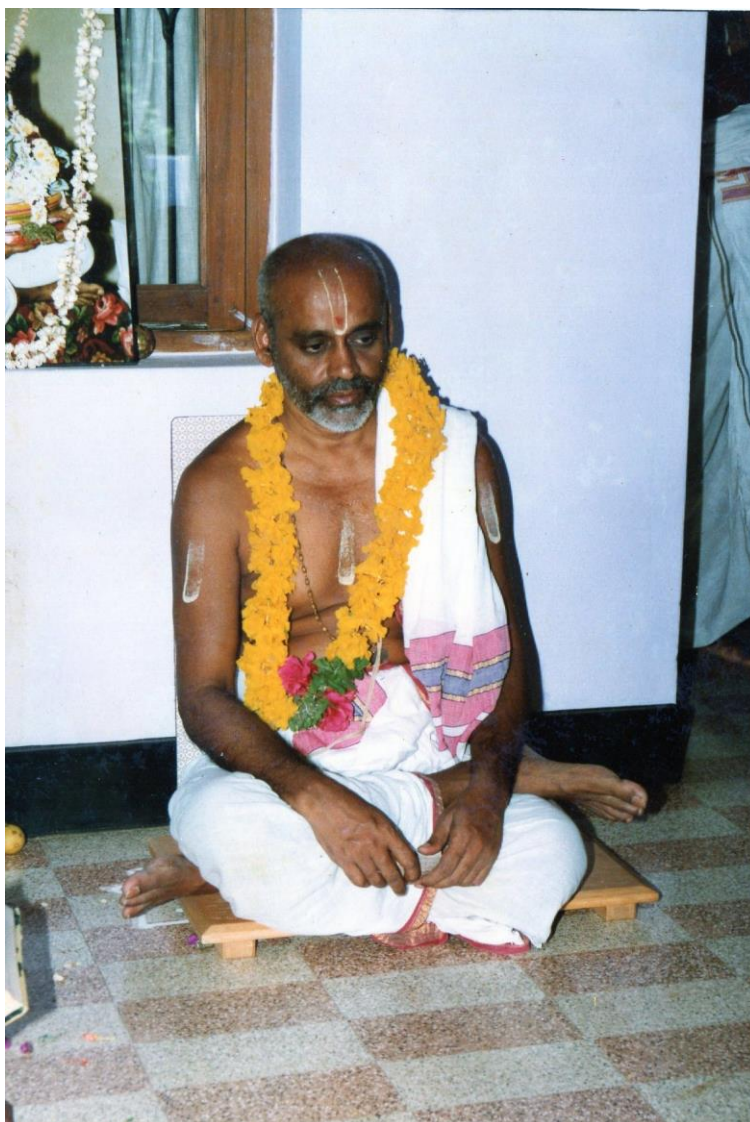
“Year after year, the same mill owner without fail arranges for the *pravachanam*. Sri Sri Anna obliges unhesitatingly and all the labourers still listen to his ‘*Kitta*’s’ story!”

When Sri Sri Anna agreed to expound *Srimad Bhagavatham* in Chennai for the first time, perhaps in 1972, the organisers arranged it in a big hall and invited the then High Court Judges. Chairs were provided for those eight or nine V.I.Ps. Behind them sat the rest of the audience. When Sri Sri Anna came, and took the dais, he saw the arrangements and could not proceed further than uttering a few *dhyana slokas*. He said, “I have committed the crime of taking the holy *Bhagavatham* to the market”. Then, he abruptly got up and went inside. Mrs. Soundaram Kailasam, wife of Justice Mr.Kailasam, and a great scholar and an orator in Tamil, confronted him about why he should give room for the thought that the expounder alone be given a raised seat and not the listeners.

Sri Sri Anna calmly replied, “I mingle with everyone. Krishna Premi is an ordinary man. He is equal to everyone else. But, *Srimad Bhagavatham* is above all of us. Deep respect should be shown to the sacredness of the Scripture. To make my point clearer, I will tell you what happened in my own life some years back. A Muslim friend wanted me to explain to him a passage in the *Quran*. Some Christians too used to approach me in those days for clearing their doubts in the *Bible*. Since this Muslim friend had to go immediately, I told him that I would visit him and explain to him in a day or two. In those days, I used to walk from village to village and would not take any conveyance. On my way to Kumbakonam a few days later, I went to his house. He received me and made me sit with him in the hall. He had kept a copy of the *Quran* reverentially on an ornate, X-shaped altar. Suddenly, his youngest son picked up the holy book and started walking away with it. My friend went up to him, washed his feet and hands, prostrated to the child, took the Holy Book from his hand and placed it back on the altar. I was watching all this with great admiration. He then came back to me, apologised for the delay and started talking. Please note, he prostrated to his own child for just carrying the Holy Book in his hand! Should we not place a person who carries the whole text in his Heart in a higher place? So, the respect demanded was not for me but for the holy *Srimad Bhagavatham*!”

EKADASI – 4

In January, 1998, Anu Ma, Srividhya Ma and I went to Paranur. Sri Sri Anna was very cheerful, though he looked tired, as he had just rushed to Paranur for *Ekadasi* from Chennai, where he was giving a series of talks on the eleventh chapter of *Srimad Bhagavatham*, which highlights pure *Jnana Marga* from the *Uddava Gita*, among other things. He himself started talking about how well the discourses turned out to be - almost to the extent of making us feel guilty for having missed them. Sri Sri Anna, however, gave us a gist of all that he had spoken in Chennai: “It is wonderful how everything came out, especially the part on *Guru Kripa*, Guru’s Grace.”



“..... who carries in his Heart the whole ‘Srimad Bhagavatham’.....”

When I expressed my sincere regret for having missed that great opportunity, Sri Sri Anna looked at me sternly, though compassionately and advised, “**Do not move out from**



Sri Sri Anna and Manni at 'Ananda Ramana' (my residence)

'Ananda Ramana', your home. You need not even go to the Ashram if you do not feel like it. If you do not like meeting with people, refrain from doing so. Just be with yourself! I will come and see you." After a pause, he gave a glance of grace and added, "Yes! '*Smaranath Arunachalam*', say the ancient texts. It is enough if you merely think of Arunachala.

"One need not do anything else. Wherever you are placed spatially, it is enough just to think of Arunachala and He will fill you with His presence! That is the true greatness of holy Arunachala!"

So rejuvenated did he seem by the very 'thought' of Arunachala that he started narrating to us some interesting reminiscences with enthusiasm, "From boyhood, I have been expounding *Srimad Bhagavatham*. Even in those days, great scholars would wonder how I could do it at such a tender age. I used to look normal and play with other children of my age on the streets. But, the moment I sat for giving discourses, spiritual matters of the

highest order would flow through me! Once, Vaidhyanatha Sastri of Sri Ramanasramam came to the village, on coming to know that a youth was expounding on *Srimad Bhagavatham*. He arrived in a bullock cart. At that moment, I was chewing fresh sugar cane by the road along with the other children of the village. He enquired about the youth who was expounding *Bhagavatham*. The other children pointed me out. When the time came, I went and sat on the platform and started narrating the chapter on ‘*Jadabharata*’. I started elaborating on the various nuances of *Jnana Marga* with effortless ease. After the exposition, Sastri gave me a big hug and told the audience that the youth was not an ordinary *pouranika* (expounder), but a great *Jnani* !”

Sri Sri Anna continued enthusiastically, “Once, I wrote to the elders in the same village expressing my willingness to conduct the *Bhagavatha Sapthaham* there. A reply came from them stating that they would all be busy since it was harvest time and that I was welcome to conduct it after that. The same day, I received an invitation signed by all the children of the village urging me to go over there and expound *Srimad Bhagavatham* to them. I was very much moved. I went and told the children that they alone should come for the *pravachanam* and, no elders were permitted. The joy of the children knew no bounds. I did not stay or eat in any of the houses. The children brought food in a tiffin carrier and we all ate it together. The women folk too used to bring lots of eatables in many containers. We used to share everything, laugh, dance, sing *bhajans* – we had a wonderful time! No elders could come in as we used to lock our room from inside. The children enjoyed listening to the discourses, as I was very careful not to miss the essence while making the heavier and more difficult portions lighter. The children refused to let me go. They became very fond of me and my expositions! Before I left, the elders apologised profusely to me. I explained to them that I was not angry with them. Instead, I got the opportunity to test whether *Srimad Bhagavatham* could be made understandable even to little children. I was happy I could succeed by His Grace! The elders then said that thenceforth I could come at any time of my choice and conduct *Bhagavatha Sapthaham* in their village!” Sri Sri Anna happily concluded, “So, see! I could rejoice giving expositions equally - both in the presence of learned scholars and innocent children!”

We all prostrated to Sri Sri Anna!

EKADASI – 5

It was a lovely, rainy day! We met Sri Sri Anna at Tirukoilur and asked him if we could come to Paranur the next day. He answered, “Come after two days. Due to rains, all roads to Paranur are heavily water logged. A little sunshine will dry them up.” An American couple, Somnath and Soma Devi, staunch devotees of Sri Bhagavan and Poonjaji, were with

us. They had expressed their desire to meet with Sri Sri Anna after hearing about him from us.

When we reached Paranur, Sri Sri Anna was inside the temple listening to *Srimad Bhagavatham* being recited by others. He was very serene, silent and solemn. After some time, he gestured to us to follow him to his room. We introduced the couple to him. Anu Ma said, “They are staunch devotees of Poonjaji. Once, Somnath wrote to Poonjaji, saying, ‘I hold you, Papaji, as my only Beloved. I feel I am unable to adore you as my guru, teacher, master or friend. My heart melts with the *bhava* that I am your *Gopi*. Reveal thyself to me as my most precious Beloved.’ Papaji too admired it very much and gave his approval with a welcoming smile.”

Listening to this, Sri Sri Anna became very happy and addressed Somnath in Tamil through me: “The highest expression of even *Jnana* is only as between the beloveds - the *mathura bhava*. Bhagavan Ramana too, gave his outpouring, *Aksharamanamalai*, assuming himself to be the bride and his Guru – Arunachala -- as his bridegroom. The highest order in *Jnana* is Unity. This is effortlessly reached through *mathura bhava*’.” From that moment, Somnath became his focus of attention until we left Paranur in the afternoon. He presented him with two volumes of *Srimad Bhagavatham* in English and two more English books – one on his teaching and the other containing his Sanskrit outpourings (with English translation) on the Sages and Saints of India.

Referring to the name Somnath, Sri Sri Anna continued, “Somnath is the name of one of the twelve *Jyothir Lingas* in North India. It is near the other *Jyothir Linga Kshetra*, Omkarnath. Many decades back, when I was not known, I went and did intense *tapas* in Omkarnath. It is situated on the banks of River Narmada. I stayed in a *choultry*. In the night between 10 and 2, I used to go upstairs and get totally absorbed in meditation. Those were glorious days of ‘solitude’. I used to notice that even before I went upstairs, a Westerner was there in deep meditation. He would be seated there before I reached and would vanish by the time I opened my eyes! One day, I deliberately stayed alert and caught him. The Westerner knew a little Hindi and so I succeeded in conversing with him. In reply to my specific question about how he was attracted to Omkarnath, he replied, ‘The spiritual thirst came to me more than fifteen years ago - I chose to quench it in India. I toured all over India, visiting ashrams and holy places. During that time, I was fortunate to be blessed with the *darshan* of a *Jyothi* at this very spot! The brilliance of that *Jyothi* gave me complete spiritual fulfilment. From then on, whenever I had enough money to travel, I come to Omkarnath. I don’t go anywhere else in the world. Since then, I have been repeatedly blessed by this *Jyothi*. Omkarnath is truly a great *punya bhoomi* (sacred place)!’

“In fact, all over the world, in every country, such sacred places still exist. But in other countries, there are no Saints to pinpoint those places and glorify them. In India, *Mahatmas* identify them and encourage true aspirants to live there and have genuine



At Paranur : (l to r) Anuradha,Manni,Sri Sri Anna,Ganesan,Somnath,Soma Devi

spiritual experiences which will lead them to spiritual fulfilment. Westerners do have perseverance and one-pointedness. Indians should imbibe this trait from them! Tell Somnath and Soma Devi that I am very happy and pleased to have met them.”

After some time of silence, he turned again to me and said, “You don’t like crowds around you, while I rejoice in their midst! But, both are the same. I too immersed myself in complete ‘solitude’ years back. Once, circumstances demanded that I be confined to a room for a long period without anyone else. I was completely absorbed in silence! I gradually came out of this phase by slowly familiarising myself to speaking little by little. As far as I am concerned, the essence of experience in ‘solitude’ or in a ‘crowd’ is identical. In the former, one is established all the time in inner poise and in the latter, one revels in outer equilibrium. Thus, in the highest experiential sense, the *Jnana* of the *Jnani* and the pure *bhakti* of the *bhakta* are identical!”

Anu Ma then interjected, “Bhagavan calls, *Bhakti* as the mother of *Jnana* – *Jnana*

Mata!” Sri Sri Anna appreciated this. I was, however, in my own way, reminded of J. Krishnamurti’s emphasis on the need for both solitude within and relationship with others, outwardly.

Sri Sri Anna was so taken up by Somnath’s sincerity that he permitted him to take as many pictures of himself as Somnath wanted! He showed genuine concern that we all should return to Arunachala before heavy rains broke out again. Somnath and Soma Devi felt totally humbled by the simplicity, spiritual magnitude, munificence, and grandeur of Sri Sri Anna!

EKADASI – 6

As usual, myself and Anu Ma were in the presence of Sri Sri Anna at Paranur on an *Ekadasi* day. It is an extraordinary privilege to be alone with him in his room. He has always been kind to us by inviting us to his room, every time. That day, Sri Sri Anna was surging with grace and joy.

He said, “Rejoice in being conscious of Awareness. This is the essence and meaning of the *Vedic* statement, ‘*Sat-Chit-Ananda*’ Existence—Consciousness—Bliss”! The Scriptures say that the unmoved all-powerful ‘*Brahman*’ expresses Itself as ‘*Sat-Chit-Ananda*’. What does it mean? Since the ‘Whole’ – the ‘*Brahman*’ – permeates all that exists, nothing is left out without containing these three spiritual aspects of the ultimate Truth.

“How? Let us take a simple, everyday example. When one is attracted to an object, how exactly does the act of attraction to the object take place? Let us view a *laddu* (a sweet) as the object. The *laddu* is there. It exists. You recognise it as a *laddu*. You are conscious of it. And, you like it immensely. You enjoy the bliss of eating it. So, even in an inert object, like the *laddu*, *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is explicitly experienced! It exists (*Sat*), you are conscious of it (*Chit*), and you enjoy eating it (*Ananda*).

“Thus, in many aspects of daily life too, the experience of *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is revealed. With this understanding, let us go deeper within and rejoice in *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. You are always soaked in *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. If you fully grasp this simple fact, you would have taken the first step to being established in the Truth!”

We both looked at him with intense reverence. Sayings of Sages and Scriptural statements abound with the Truth. They are not ‘statements’ but ‘states’ to be directly experienced by the aspiring seeker.

On another day, too, Sri Sri Anna clarified, “Even serious spiritual aspirants have one doubt: How did the all-pervading ‘Whole’, the *Brahman*, get caught up as an individual soul

(*jiva*) within a human body? The explanation is very simple:

“Consider : There is a large, clean wall. You draw a small circle on it with a coloured chalk. Having drawn it, you wonder, ‘How did the wall come inside the circle?’

“Firstly, you defiled the clean wall by drawing a circle on it. This is the same as taking your body to be your Self. The wall was already there. It did not come into the circle. The superimposed demarcation of limiting yourself as the body has caused all the confusion.

“Actually, there is no room for any confusion, as the ‘Self’ has always existed - the ‘Self’ alone exists and the ‘Self’ alone will ever exist ! Fully cognise that whenever you are not conscious of the body – as in deep sleep -- you continue to exist as the Self. The Self is the only continuous Truth. All the rest are *partial* truths. It is like the example of you and your shadow. Both exist, but with this difference - you are existence itself, whereas the shadow ‘*appears*’ to exist. ‘You’ are the Truth and your ‘shadow’ is only a *partial* truth ! ”

“Pay full attention to the I AM and not to ‘I am this name’ and ‘I am this form.’ Give up your identification with the ‘body’ and all problems are instantly solved. You will then be constantly established in the Self. Sri Bhagavan firmly declares that ‘Awareness alone is the I AM. Experience IT by remaining as the ‘Self’ all the time. Give up the ‘I-am-the-body’ idea.”

EKADASI – 7

Our regular pilgrimages to Paranur – either on *Ekadasi* or *Dwadasi* – gave both of us true inner joy! On such occasions, we would mostly stay until evening, listen to the chanting of *Vishnu Sahasranamam* in the presence of Sri Sri Anna. And, when we took leave of him, he would occasionally ask us whether we have seen *Ulagalandha Perumal*. In course of time, we also became intensely devoted to *Ulagalandha Perumal* and having his *darshan*.

The temple *archaka* (priest) got used to our visits. An additional reason for him to be attached to us, was that one of the boys he knew was studying in Sri Ramanasramam *Veda Pathasala*. Once, the priest exclaimed the true greatness of the *Perumal*. His right foot is lifted towards the heaven, while His left foot is rooted on the earth.

A drop of water from the big toe of His right foot being worshipped by the celestial beings in Heaven, formed the huge River Ganga. Ganga once flowed only in heaven - delighting the celestial beings. It was King Bhageeratha who brought Ganga from heaven to

earth. Since we both are deeply devoted to Ganga Mata, this imposing standing idol of *Ulagalandha Perumal* (a 20-foot wooden Idol) became the focus of our devout attention!

On one such visit to this temple, when we entered the *sanctum sanctorum*, the priest came to me after taking the *aarti*. Usually, he would only talk to Anu Ma. On that day, quite unusually, he addressed me: “They have planned to cover the entire form of *Perumal* in pure gold. The devotees have voluntarily undertaken to take up the cost of gold to cover the entire form, except the lifted foot. In fact, many are ready to take it up also. But, *Perumal* has instructed me to ask ‘you’ alone for that gold. So, take up that *kainkarya* (donation) and get blessed by *Perumal*.”



Ulagalandha Perumal (Lord's Right Foot reaching the Heaven)

When I stood still unable to answer either way, noticing my predicament, Anu Ma offered her gold bangles. But the priest refused to accept them and firmly reiterated, “The gold must come *only from him*,” and pointed his finger directly at me! We returned home without a clue about what to do, as we both knew very well that I did not have any gold!



Ravi Ramanan

On reaching home, Anu Ma suddenly remembered that two years back, my brother's son, Ravi, had gifted me a piece of gold on his return from abroad. He put it in a corner of my *puja* shelf. I had totally forgotten about it. Fortunately, Anu Ma found it after searching for it.

We both went to Paranur and narrated the whole incident to Sri Sri Anna. He seemed very pleased. He joyously exclaimed, “In the *Vaishnava* tradition, it is said that *Perumal* talks through the *archaka*. You are fortunate. You have been chosen. If you have brought that piece of gold with you, come, let us all go to Tirukoilur and hand it over to the ‘*Jeer*’ Swami who has undertaken this huge task. He is the right authority to receive it.” We all went to the residence of the ‘*Jeer*’ Swami and Sri Sri Anna handed over the gold piece to him. The Swami offered us dinner and noted down our address.

The next *Ekadasi* was *Vaikunta Ekadasi*. We knew that there would be a very huge crowd both at the temple and at Paranur. Hence, we went to Paranur the previous evening itself. Sri Sri Anna received us with extra-jubilation, saying, “Come! We all will go to *Ulagalandha Perumal*. They have adorned Him entirely with gold. Ganesa! Your contribution of gold on His lifted, right foot, glows. Tomorrow, it will be very difficult to enter the temple and have *darshan*. So, let us go now itself and have an exclusive *darshan* of *Perumal*.” Saying this, Sri Sri Anna, got into the taxi, in which we had come from Arunachala, like an excited child!

How can I describe that glorious event of being exclusively in the presence of *Ulagalandha Perumal* who was adorned in gold! That too, with only the three of us standing in front of Him and receiving His blessings in abundance! On that sacred spot, I offered prayers on behalf of Ravi without whose gift we could not have had this tremendously exhilarating spiritual experience! For the three of us, that previous night itself was *Vaikunta Ekadasi*!

While writing this at this distance of time, I again offer my prayers that Ravi who departed from us three years ago, be blessed to reside in ‘*Vaikunta*’ -- the abode of Lord Vishnu in Heaven !



*Sri Krishna's instruction to Uddava :
" I AM in the 'Hearts' of My devotees"*

EKADASI – 8

Sukhatal must be the most unspoilt village in India. Except for loud-speakers blaring constantly, nothing modern has invaded the place. The narration of *Srimad Bhagavatham* in different languages fills its air. The sacred river *Ganga Mata* that encircles Sukhatal, flows slowly and softly as if lingering to listen to the Great Epic! There is also a huge 30-foot

statue of Hanuman standing and looking at the village from the banks of Ganga Mata. One wonders when the illustrious Hanuman started listening to *Srimad Bhagavatham*! This is the holy place where the original *Srimad Bhagavatham* took place - Sage Sukha is said to have narrated *Srimad Bhagavatham* to King Parikshit who was cursed to die in seven days. The King's non-stop, attentive listening to the narration, made him an immortal hero of Hindu mythology!

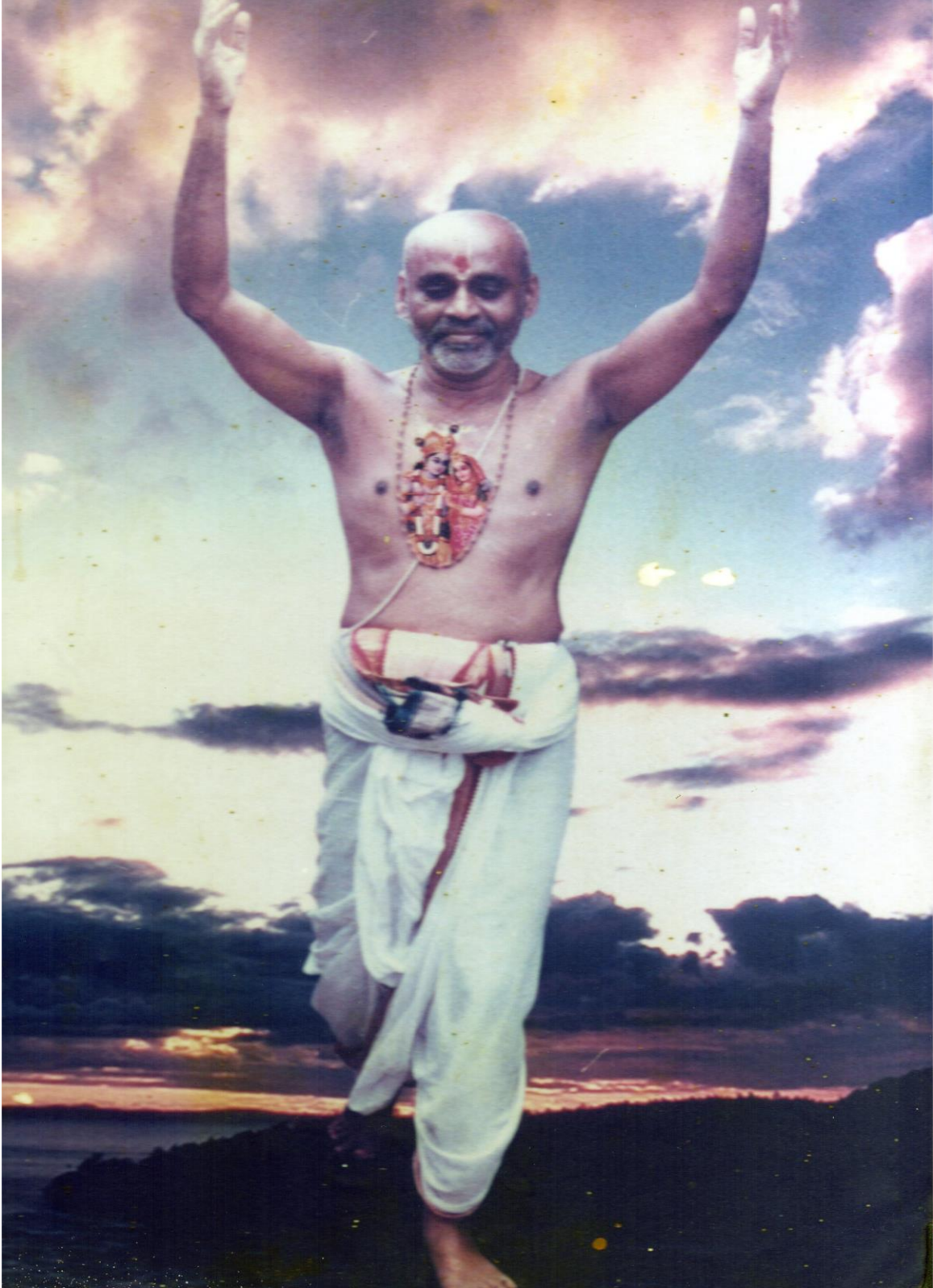
It was in this sacred place that Sri Sri Anna was discoursing on the *Srimad Bhagavatham* from sunrise to sunset. *Pundits* would chant its verses for an hour and Sri Sri Anna would then explain, almost line by line, '*Srimad Bhagavatham*' and its rich contents.

On the last day, upon my request, Sri Sri Anna went into detail about Uddava and the efficacy of Lord Krishna's *upadesa* to Uddava, in '*Uddava Gita*'. He drew as many similarities between Hanuman, the devotee of Sri Rama and Uddava, the devotee of Sri Krishna. Both, Hanuman and Uddava, spent their whole lives serving their Masters. The former was sent as a trusted messenger to Sita and the latter to Radha. Both were *Jnanis* and both were also left behind to spread the *dharma*.

Uddava asked Sri Krishna, "When you depart from this mortal coil, Oh Lord, where will I find you? Where will I seek for Thee?" The Lord replied, "Go to my temples, Oh Uddava! I will be residing there. And, if you are in any doubt as to where 'My temples' are, they are in the 'Hearts' of My devotees. Therefore, go to where My devotees are, seek Me in them, for, through them will I ever manifest Myself in this world!"

The '*Bhagavatha Yagna*' ended with what the '*Bhagavathas*' call the '*Avabrutha Snaan*', where the main idol (Sri Krishna) which sat listening to the '*Srimad Bhagavatham*' for seven days, was carried by the narrator to the Ganga Mata for a holy bath.

Three hundred devotees walked in front and behind Sri Sri Anna, singing, "*Radhe Shyam, Radhe Shyam*", at the top of their voices. Sri Sri Anna became God-intoxicated and started dancing with the idol placed in his hands. The devotees also went into ecstasy at this sight and started dancing while walking backwards facing Sri Sri Anna and the idol towards the Ganga Mata.



Sri Sri Anna in ecstasy (in Chaitanya bhava)

I went very close to Sri Sri Anna to look at the idol, for the first time in seven days! He was in the form that *Srimad Bhagavatham* describes as having appeared in front of Mother Devaki – a small baby with four arms. He had a very sweet smile, as if he was enjoying the whole situation! Despite the countless *sapthahams* of *Srimad Bhagavatham* that must have taken place in Sukhatal, I am sure, the village would not have seen such a madly ecstatic procession as this!

Sri Sri Anna was in a divine trance when he placed the idol on the bank of Ganga Mata and bathed Him first. Then, placing Him on his head, with both his hands clasping the idol he walked into the Ganga Mata, and dipped himself three times in the holy river with the idol on his head. Every one got into the Ganga Mata with their attires on.

I too took a dip, with the prayer that I one day taste at least a drop of Sri Sri Anna's devotion!

EKADASI – 9

Brindavan Ekadasi is the most auspicious and fervently observed *Ekadasi* in Brindavan. The story of protecting the King Ambarish, from the wrath of Sage Dhurvasa by the Lord's *chakra* (discus) took place in Brindavan on that day.

That day at 3 o'clock, when Sri Sri Anna started *Srimad Bhagavatham*, he gave strict instructions that everyone should have a copy of *Srimad Bhagavatham* and follow it as it was chanted. I was quite worried about this condition. The paramount book in my life had always been *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil -- "*Sri Ramana Nool Thirattu*". I didn't want to add another book to it. He repeated this instruction three times during his discourse that day.

After the discourse, Sri Sri Anna announced that he was going for *darshan* of Sri Krishna in all the temples and that all were welcome to follow him. But there was one condition – they all should chant '*Radhe Shyam*' all the time to the exclusion of any other talk or sound! He then proceeded to walk majestically like a wild elephant through the main streets of Brindavan, accompanied by the thundering reverberation of '*Radhe Shyam*', drawing the onlooker's wonder struck attention.

It was very different from that of Sukhatal. There, he himself was not there. Here, he was fully there - dancing with wrist movements, catching everyone's attention with his eyes and drawing them to him! All the three temples that he went to, received him ceremoniously. In every temple, he made *Manni* along with her twenty students sing the



Younger son Sri Rangan devoutly following his father



Elder son Sri Hari with Sri Sri Anna in ecstasy



Paranur Village



Sri Sri Anna's 80th Birthday celebrations



song composed by the saint of that temple to its deity. The temples' traditional managers were very moved to hear the almost forgotten compositions!

It was an unusual scene when Sri Sri Anna started at 7 the next morning – the audience stood up in the hall for a *sankalpam* (an undertaking) that each one of them would read the *Srimad Bhagavatham* regularly. Sri Sri Anna took the book from each person, blessed it and gave it back. Some, even got their copy signed by him. I did not go anywhere near him and sat as far away as possible, leaning on the wall.

When the whole crowd settled and the reading started, he beckoned me with his eyes and put out his hand for my book. I gave it – *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. He went through it, very slowly, making me stand like a bad student in a class room! After leafing through the whole book, asked me for a pen. I looked helplessly around. Fortunately, someone lent me one. Sri Sri Anna wrote in it, **“May Sri Bhagavan’s *Amrita*-like (nectar like) words ever remain sweet in your Heart !”** I felt most blessed!

Next day, Sri Sri Anna called me again and browsing through my book, said, “There is *Srimad Bhagavatham* in this!” I replied, “Yes! In *Ulladu Narpadu Anubhandham*, Sri Bhagavan has taken two verses from *Srimad Bhagavatham* and translated them into Tamil verses.” I then recited them, softly to him:

“That which is the Support, the Self, the Source, the Purpose and the Power of all this world, the Reality behind all these appearances, That indeed exists. Let that, the Truth, abide in our Heart.”

- Invocation: Reality in Forty Verses – Supplement

* * * * *

“Holy rivers – which are only water; and, idols – which are made of stone and clay are not as mighty as the Sages are. For, while they make one pure in the course of countless days, the Sages’ eyes by a mere glance purify at once.”

- Reality in Forty Verses – Supplement, v.3

EKADASI – 10

The fourth day after *Brindavan Ekadasi*, was the *Raasa Leela* festival. Sri Sri Anna's narrations on Sri Krishna's Gokula and Brindavan *leelas* (sport) brought Lord Krishna alive before every one's eyes! The next day was the celebration of the most sacred *Raasa Leela* - Sri Krishna's dance with all the *gopis*.

There was a lot of expectation in the air that night! Hundreds of devotees had come from all over. *Brijavaasis* (local girls) – from the age of 8 to 16 years -- were dressed up as *Gopis*, with the *ashta sakhis* and a very beautiful Radha standing calmly in their midst. Their costumes and make-up had been personally overseen by *Manni*.

Sri Sri Anna started singing Saint Jayadeva's *Ashtapati*, which describes the rapturous scene – the full moon, the gentle, slightly chilly breeze blowing on the creepers, the jasmine buds just blossoming, the river Yamuna reflecting the whole scene and Sri Krishna playing on His flute! Standing behind the idol of Sri Krishna, Sri Sri Anna beckoned the little girls, who danced and sang from *Ashtapati*. When they were supposed to hold each other's hands and dance in a circle, Sri Sri Anna went and joined them. He became joyful like a little boy!

He then beckoned *Manni* with his eyes. Both stood in the centre and nodded invitingly at the older *Brijvasi* women. About 25 of them made the second circle around the little girls and started singing their local *Raasa Leela* songs. The Tamil devotees, getting jealous and excited, commented, "This is quite an unusual *Raasa Leela*. Anna has never permitted older women to dance with him!" When the song was about to be over, *Manni* nodded to all her kitchen assistants and older friends to join. About forty of them made the third circle. Amidst them, was a famous *Abhang* singer, who takes care of the Panduranga temple in Chennai. (She is the only person that I have come across, whose voice is ten times louder than that of Anu Ma's!) Sri Sri Anna signalled to her and she started singing one of the most unusual Tamil folk songs:

*“Upon waking, Baby Krishna’s eyes shone – ‘Pala Pala’
 Crawling sleepily searching for His mother,
 His side-bun moved – ‘Saanju Saanju’
 His bangles hit against each other that sounded – ‘Kinu Kinu’
 His anklets of the feet dragging on the floor went – ‘Jilu Jilu’
 The pendant of His chain swinging upon His chest dangled – ‘Minu Minu’
 Finding His mother churning the butter – ‘Chala Chala’
 He held on to the churning rod for His milk with a pretentious cry
 Getting mad at her with rod broke the pot – ‘Pada Pada’
 Stealing some butter, running away from mother – ‘Gudu Gudu’
 Seeing the atrocities, the heavy mother chasing behind Him – ‘Dabu Dabu’
 Bound to the grinding stone He crawled along effortlessly through the two trees, breaking
 them – ‘Mada Mada’
 Liberating the arrogant gandharvas
 Upon singing and dancing on Him, may He Liberate us too!*

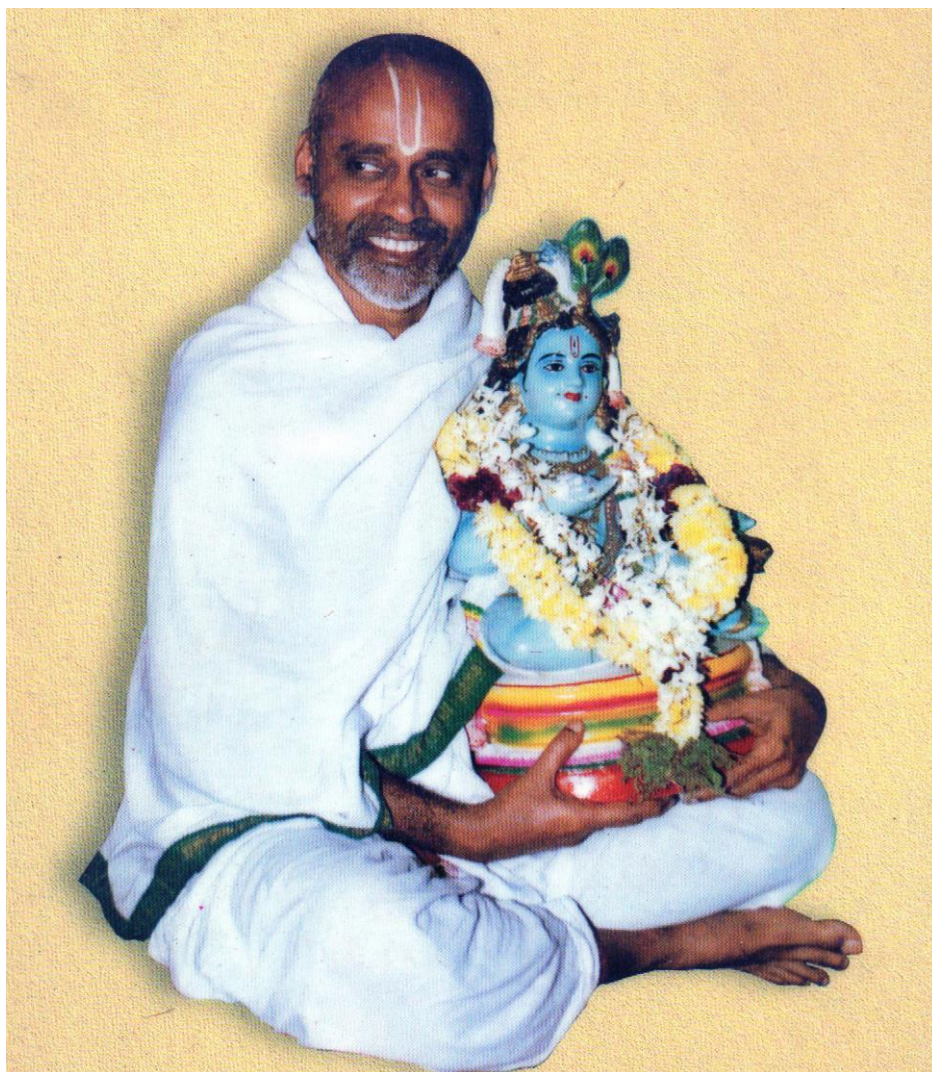


“.....stealing some butter,running away from mother.....”

She sang and made the others repeat every line after her. The childlike narration of the story made everyone drop their inhibitions. Soon, the fourth and the fifth circles of dancers formed without even being invited! The first circle went around clockwise, the second anti-clock-wise, the third clockwise and so on.

***Manni* got into the *bhava* (mood) of Sri Krishna, picked up the Idol, held it in front of her face, and started running around Sri Sri Anna – *Gudu Gudu*! One, Kamakshi Maami, the *sarvadhikari* of the dining hall, assumed Yasoda's role and started chasing *Manni* around Sri Sri Anna. The singer not wanting to stop the singing amidst such mirth and joy, went on singing the lines again and again, until it was lingering in every cell of everyone's body. The dancers were so perfectly co-ordinated that it seemed as if they had rehearsed together for years!**

In the centre, Sri Sri Anna intoxicated with the rhyme of the singing and the rhythm of the dancing, moved to the *bhava* of Saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, with his palms thrown up towards the sky, head tilted upward, ecstasy expressing itself through every pore of his body! In response to this, the 200 ladies dancing around him seemed none other than the *gopis*!



“.....Sri Sri Anna seemed like the very Creative Force.....”

The formation resembled a huge lotus flower with multi-coloured petals made up of gaily dressed women. Sri Sri Anna seemed like the very Creative Force around which everything – animate and inanimate – revolved. The men were trying to peep at the spectacle from every nook and corner like the celestial beings of the mythological *Krishna Leela*!

It was sheer joy all through! It enabled me to understand, perhaps for the first time, the meaning of Sri Bhagavan's sacred words: **"In the inner core of everyone's Heart, Arunachala, the 'Presence', dances in stillness!"**

A sense of abounding joy gushed through my whole being! A state of pure *Ananda* prevailed throughout my stay at Brindavan!

VANAMALI *

Oh! Vanamali!

Wilt Thou dance with me?

Wilt Thou walk beside me on the Shore of Infinity?

Wilt Thou partner me in the Dance of Eternity?

Oh! Vanamali!

Wilt Thou hold my hand on stony paths and thorns?

Wilt Thou teach me to play the game of the soul?

Oh! Vanamali!

In the 'Raasa Leela' of Life, wilt Thou dance with me?

My former-partner!

My sole support, my only Friend,

Oh! Vanamali!

Wilt Thou guide me through the tragedy of Life?

Through the comedy of Death?

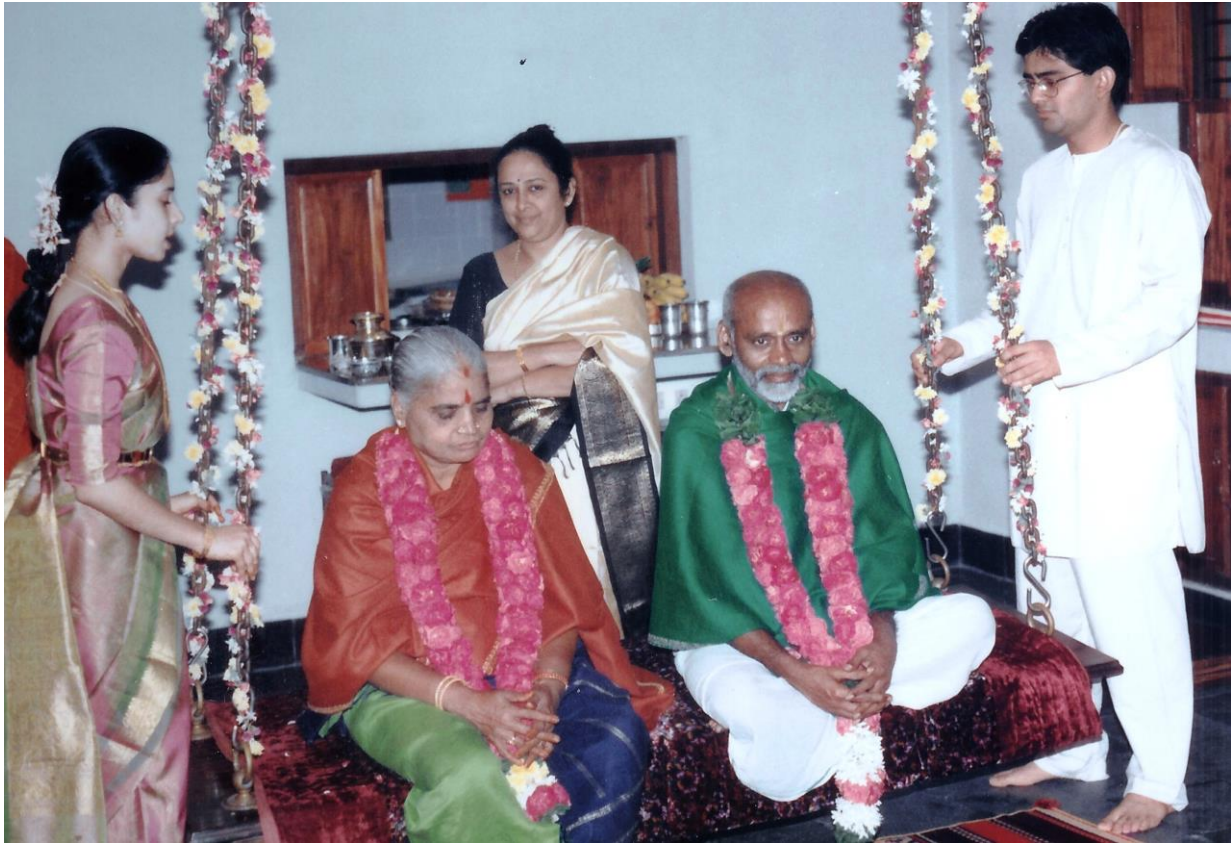
Into the Deathless Realm,

Where game and players merge into ONE...Into Thee,

Oh! Vanamali!

My only Love!

**Wilt Thou dance with me?*



Vidya and Sankar (newly married) being blessed by the 'presence' of Sri Sri Anna and Manni at 'Ananda Vana' (Anu Ma's residence)

EKADASI – 11

In 1995, I left Sri Ramanasramam, whose noble seva I had committed myself to do from 1960. Stumbling out of that safe and protective world of mine, I travelled to scores of pilgrim centres and took dips in holy waters of India – mostly in the holy company of Sri Sri Anna. This continued for seven years until after my heart surgery (in 2003).

Previously, Yogi Ramsuratkumar protected me, stayed in my life for 'seven years', thus saving me from intense suffering. Yogiji even guided me during that period to go away from Arunachala to holy Kashi for a year! I would run to Yogiji almost every day, carrying my intense mental agony like a child running towards its mother. He too, like a true mother, graciously took me under the cool shade of his Grace-filled umbrella, until all my problems were totally resolved! What love, what compassion, what blessing!

While Yogi Ramsuratkumar was soft like a mother, Sri Sri Anna was stern and majestic like a father! Yogiji would ask me what he could do for me. Sri Sri Anna, on the other hand, would warn me, "You should not give importance to the vagaries of the mind and the demands of the body."

Once, Sri Sri Anna visited us. Seated in Anu Ma's swing at her house, 'Savithri', he requested her to do the evening *parayanam* there itself, saying, "This too is the Ashram!" Kanakamma, Srividya, Jnanasundari and Parvathamma were also there. Anu Ma started reciting 'Bhagavad Gita Saram' – 42 verses, selected and translated by Sri Bhagavan into Tamil.

After listening with keen attention and reverence, Sri Sri Anna gave an absorbing and scintillating talk based on the selected verses, using Sri Bhagavan's own Tamil words. It was a sheer blessing to hear it.

Then, Sri Sri Anna turned pointedly to me and said, "Do not accept *namaskarams* (prostrations), adorations and praises of admiration from anyone. They will keep you in bondage to them. You are ever free from any form of binding and bondage. Be free! Be like a thief! Hide away from attention of people. You are the Self. Abide in the Heart, wherein Sri Bhagavan resides as the 'Inner Guru'. Surrender yourself only to the 'Inner Guru', who is guiding you from within, all the time. Be the Self!"

I went into a deep and joy filled silence!

Another day, we both were at Paranur. That was truly a sacred day. I went into the room of Sri Sri Anna along with Anuradha. The 'Saint of Paranur' was glowing with the brilliance of *Jnana, Bhakthi, Yoga and Karma*. We were both filled with peace and bliss. We deeply felt that we had had a remarkably wonderful session of spiritual clarity! When the time came for us to take leave and return to holy Arunachala, he rose from his easy-chair and gave us *prasad* of fruits. Before receiving it, I prostrated – filled with spiritual fervour.

Though he permitted it to happen, Sri Sri Anna compassionately chided me, "Are you cheating me or cheating yourself? Why all these prostrations? Are we 'two'? Is there anything else other than the 'Oneness', the 'Whole', the '*Purna*' ? You and I are never different - ever! When you come here and stand along with others in the crowd, I feel insulted. I call you, make you sit next to me so that you feel there is no separation between us. 'You' and 'I' are 'ONE' !"

Then, in a state of ecstatic benediction, Sri Sri Anna quoted Sri Bhagavan's Tamil verses 4 to 10 from *Bhagavad Gita Saram*:

"I am the Self, O Gudakesa, dwelling in the Hearts of all beings. I am the beginning and the middle and the end of all beings." (x:20)

"For to him who is born, death is indeed certain; and, to him who dies, birth is certain. Therefore, you should not grieve for the inevitable." (ii:27)



"Bhagavad Gita: Sri Krishna instructing Arjuna in the battlefield"

"Invulnerable He is, not to be burnt, not to be drenched or dried. He is eternal, all-pervading, changeless, motionless, enduring." (ii:24)

"Know that which pervades all this to be indestructible. That immutable none can destroy." (ii:27)

"The unreal has no being, the Real has no non-being. These two facts the Truth-Seers perceive." (ii:16)

"Just as the all-pervading ether, being subtle, is not affected, (tainted or contaminated) (by anything), even so, the Self pervading the whole body is not tainted." (xiii:33)

Listening to Sri Sri Anna's exemplary talk on that day and being in his Grace-filled presence, elevated each one of us to a spiritual state of ecstasy.

How fortunate I am, and for that matter, every one of us, that Grace guides us, in the form of Sages and Saints!

Following, adhering to the sacred words of Sri Bhagavan, let us abide in and as the Self:

"What IS, is only Grace. Abide in the Self."



“.....in the spiritual presence of the powerful Sage.....”

After a few days, we went again to Paranur, to be with and to soak ourselves in the spiritual presence of this powerful Sage! The previous evening, I had gone around the Holy Hill Arunachala and while crossing ‘*Panchamukha Darshana*’, the following two verses gushed forth from my Heart! On return to “*Ananda Ramana*”, I wrote them down.

When we reached Paranur and entered into his room, Sri Sri Anna extended his hands as if demanding something from me, with a broad smile and a Heart brimming with Love, Grace and Compassion. I placed these verses in his sacred palm.

*“ இன்று இங்கு இப்போதே இருப்பாய் இருந்து ஆழ் உள் ஆனந்தத்துள்
என்று பணித்திடும் பகவான் ரமணர் பரணே -- பற்றிடு! நீ
கன்றுக் குரங்கு நல் தாய்ப் பூனை ஞான நாதன் ரமணனே
நன்று நில் பூரணனாய் அருள் உற்று.”*

(“Bhagavan Ramana, now commands you to dive within into the Ocean of Bliss by remaining ever as the ‘Awareness per se’ - HERE and NOW - consciously, as ‘IT’ alone is the Eternal Truth! ‘It’ alone is God Himself.

“To successfully abide by His commandment, you have to necessarily make the effort of ‘clinging’ like the baby monkey to Him. On His part, He assures you that like the ‘mother cat’ He will complete the process of your Perfection by taking you to Self-Realisation - the Truth of Wholeness.”)

" என் உடல் உள்ளத்துள் உணவூட்டுஞ் சீரோங்கு தோன்றலே
என் உயிருக்கு ஒளிசேர் களி பொழிக் -- களஞ்சியமே
உன் உயிருக்குப் பிறப்புண்டோ உளத்திற்கேதான் இறப்புமுண்டோ
உன் உயிரின் உயிரே ஆத்ம அழகே அன்பே வாழியவே ! "

("You, who hail from a Culture Supreme,
have been energizing my body and my soul!
You, who are yourself a 'Rich Treasure',
have been enriching my Heart, with bliss and lustrous glory, awake!
Can there be birth for the soul given to me? Neither
can there be any 'trace of death' for the Heart given me by You?
You truly are the 'Life Force' of your 'Life Being' !
Oh! Beauty of Self!
Oh! Fullness of Love!
YOU ever live as BEING!")

He read them, kept them with himself; and, said :

"They are the Truth showered on us by Lord Arunachala!"



*Panchamukha-darshan (divine view of 'Five Faces' of Arunachala) -- an important landmark on
'Arunachala giripradakshina'*



NANNAGARU



Life

B. V. L. N. RAJU was born on September 23, 1934, at Kommara -- his maternal grandfather's village in West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh -- though his native place is JINNURU. His ancestors, who were peasants, were by nature devotional, magnanimous, humane and venerable. He lost his father at an early age and his mother and grandmother were instrumental in raising him.

As a child he was gentle, humble, and compassionate by nature. While still in school, he strove to look after those who were less fortunate by helping with meals and even organizing and extending financial help. While he felt that social service done in the right spirit is instrumental in freeing one from the bonds of ego, he was not fully satisfied. Hence, at the age of twenty, he went to North India on a pilgrimage, along with his grandmother. That long religious travel -- both to the Himalayas and to Varanasi -- inculcated in him spiritual aspirations. He got the blessings of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh; and, one Swami Atmananda induced in him serious study of the Sankara *Bhashya* (commentary) on *The Bhagavad Gita* and other scriptural texts. Abiding by such powerful guidance, he started living the teaching, in his daily living.

While the young Nannagaru was deeply rooted in acquiring scriptural knowledge, a significant event brought about a total change in his life. Let us listen to Nannagaru's own narration :

"In 1957, I had a dream one night. An old man with a staff in his hand, raised me from the bed and kissed me hard on my cheeks. I was perplexed. I pleaded with him to leave me alone. The stranger paid no heed to my words. I had a feeling that he was invading my life. I was seized with fear and tried hard to wriggle out of his grip. While he was holding me in

his embrace, my pillow fell on to the floor. He lifted it off the ground, adjusted it on my bed and gently laid me back on the cot. He looked at me compassionately and left me -- as a Doctor would leave a patient.

"For six months, I was struggling to know who this 'stranger' could be. One day while reading the daily newspaper, *The Hindu*, in our village library, I saw an advertisement about a book '*The Great Men of India*' by Madras Book Publishing House. Going through the arranged list of these great men, I felt a thrill when I read the seventh name : "*Sri Ramana Maharshi*". I felt here was a man who would draw me to the cave of my Heart. I got the book on Sri Ramana Maharshi through post from the Madras company. The book contained his portrait also; and, I recognized the person who had appeared before me in my dream six months earlier.

"The divine person -- *Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* -- lived in 'Arunachala' in Tamil Nadu and was revered all over the World. His physical life ended on April 14, 1950, in his seventieth year.

"He had no personal life of His own. His life was but the Splendour of the 'Self'. Equality was His life-breath. Many blessed people achieved fulfillment in their lives by the mere *darshan* of the Maharshi. He was like a blazing Sun in the spiritual firmament of India. The chanting of His Name is itself auspicious. He is the *Mahatma* of all *Mahatmas* ('The Sage among all Sages')."

After reading the first book on Sri Bhagavan: '*Self-Realisation*' by B.V.Narasimha Swamy, he had a very deep connection with Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Nannagaru paid his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in January, 1959. From then on, he dedicated his life to the service of Sri Bhagavan. He said: "Bhagavan Ramana's name, form and teaching helped me powerfully in my spiritual progress". He would often say: "It was not my choice that Sri Bhagavan came into my life. He took me into His fold, thus blessing me, profusely! "

During one such dedicated visits to Arunachala, in 1982, while lying down in the Ashram Guest Room, Sri Bhagavan blessed Nannagaru. In his own words : "Sri Bhagavan opened the track between the 'Spiritual Heart' and the '*Sahasrara*'. I felt the awakening of the '*Amruta Nadi*'. From then on, 'Bliss' is being experienced". It was the new beginning. The blissful peace that became his nature was also transmitted to those around him, providing solace to many suffering souls. He started to speak on Sri Bhagavan, gathering thousands of new devotees who had never heard of Arunachala or Sri Ramana Maharshi and allowed them to experience the power of Sri Bhagavan's Grace. In addition to his

widely attended talks, he wrote, translated and published many books on the Direct Teaching of Sri Bhagavan thereby drawing an even wider audience in rural Andhra Pradesh.

Having been established in that state, Nannagaru has become a beacon of hope for those yearning for true spiritual solace. His speeches and books are powerful but his silence is even more awe-inspiring. Many come with wordly troubles and their tortured minds are assuaged by his silence and gentle words. He always turns them towards Sri Bhagavan's immortal teaching and, like a miracle, their problems get dissolved!

Always clad in white, Nannagaru is easily accessible to all. Seekers from various corners of the world have sought him out and on their sincere requests, he has visited several countries including the Middle East and England. He energizes and lifts the crowds up so much so that he has been named "Crowd Puller" and far more aptly, 'The child of Bhagavan'. He once said, spreading the Direct Teaching of the Maharshi is not a part of my life, but it is my 'life' itself." It is interesting to read the poem they wrote on his visit, emphasizing his Love and Compassion.

Closing Ceremony Reflection

How quickly the time has passed by us
Since we first met on Friday's eve!
Our hearts are full now, with wonder
At the loving that we receive.

The mind's like the noise of the traffic
Or bleating of goats in the field.
Bhagavan whispered that we should surrender
But we were too stubborn to yield.

As we sit here together in silence
With only the singing of birds,
We know that the wisdom at stillness
Takes us deeper than ever can words.

We feel Bhagavan's grace washing o'er us
And filling the room with His peace.
He tells us "Let go of all wanting
and your hearts will find perfect release."

The guru may be in the body
Or that may have vanished to dust,
But what is supremely important
Is giving him all of our trust.

Of Sadhana, spiritual practice,
There's no higher than this, be you sure:
Patiently bear every insult
And injuries humbly endure

Oh Lord, what can we do to please you,
In gratitude for all of this?
“Let go of the mind, and drop the small self —
One with me in Peace, Love and Bliss!”

Oh Dearest Sri Nanna Garu!
Please give us your blessing and grace,
That our hearts may be filled with your sweetness
As mirrors of Bhagavan's face!

True to this cause, he constructed at Jinnur in 1984, the “*Ramana Kshetram*” – a nucleus spiritual centre! He dedicated it exclusively for spreading Bhagavan Ramana’s direct teaching of ‘spiritual awakening’ in the hearts of the devotees visiting it. He also arranged to build two ashrams at Thiruvannamalai for devotees to visit and also stay and pursue ‘spiritual *sadhana*’. Thirty years ago, he started a monthly magazine in Telugu: ‘*Ramana Bhaskara*’ benefiting fifty thousand readers and spiritual aspirants as well as a website (www.srinannagaru.com) which has furthered spread the teaching all over the world.

From the time Nannagaru first visited Sri Ramanasramam, he devoted his life for propagating the message of *Sat-Guru* Ramana. According to him, helping devotees in worldly matters is equally spiritual. He never wanted to become popular, maintained a very low profile and thus made himself available to all, at all times, throughout the year. His love and compassion being boundless, he speaks to everyone that comes for his *darshan* with the same empathy and passion. He is truly eager to find out about their welfare, their family and their problems. He joyously participates in important life events of his devotees. He shares his childlike, infectious compassion to all those who come within his realm and asserts: “The more you give, the more you receive. Your very living becomes true meditation” .

Ultimately though, he focuses his devotees’ attention on the direct, vital, non-sectarian approach of Bhagavan Ramana for attaining the Truth. With his own example and life, he exemplifies the nuances of ‘*Atma Vichara*’ but gives equal importance to total surrender to *Sat-Guru* Ramana – the ever-existing ‘Inner Guru’. He thus draws one’s attention on how to curb latent tendencies, how to overcome ‘I-am-the-body idea’, how to cut the roots of the ego. He equips them with ‘practical spiritual tools’ which enables them to maintain self-confidence, mental equanimity and the ability to deal with the challenges of the world. Ultimately, he reminds them that ‘The true spiritual treasure’ is embedded within one’s Heart and the constant practice of diving deep within one’s own Heart is true spiritual practice.”



V.Ganesan, Nannagaru and Anuradha

NANNAGARU on SRI BHAGAVAN

During Nannagaru's recent visit to Arunachala, in September 2016, Anuradha and I went to his ashram and spent very useful time with him. We requested him to summarise Sri Bhagavan's teachings and its uniqueness. The following is what Nannagaru said in brief about the uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan's teaching:

"Sri Bhagavan's teachings were completely subjective. Though there were many masters who have realized the Truth, no one's teaching was completely subjective or without reference to suffering."

"Bhagavan Ramana's teaching was direct and never relative. Even the Buddha and Sri Rama and Sri Krishna though towering Godmen in spiritual history, had suffering in their life as well as in their teachings. They spoke about cleansing and purification of the mind. For example, when a patient comes with a particular disease to a doctor, he examines the patient, identifies the disease, finds the remedy and then, effects the elimination of the disease. Similarly, other saints confirmed that it is the mind which is the root cause of all suffering, through various methods, techniques, and yogic practices. Whereas, Sri Bhagavan told *sadhakas* to question if the mind really existed. He put forward the Truth as

it IS, without any form of division, separation, and duality.”

“Sri Bhagavan did not see the world, as a separate entity. For him, there was no world apart from him. Hence, there was no speck of duality. His core teaching is that there is no cause for any form of sorrow outside of oneself - one only needs to drop the false sense of doer-ship.”

“Sri Bhagavan repeatedly affirmed that the sense of the feeling of the ‘me’ and ‘mine’ are merely the play of thoughts - they are the cause of all suffering. He guided us to enquire if the one who sees the world is real in the first place! Check if there really exists any cause for the disease (suffering) at all! If the world does appear apart from oneself, it is merely due to one’s ignorance.”

“Sri Bhagavan was *Brahman* and saw the whole creation as *Brahman* too. Sri Bhagavan was once asked by a devotee what he saw while watching the Mountain. Sri Bhagavan replied: ‘I am seeing myself!’ ”

“World is an illusion created in *Brahman*. All bodies and appearances are shadows in IT. We cry over the loss of body as we think we are the body. What is not true appears as true due to *maya* (illusion). One must wake up from this illusion through Self-Enquiry by raising the question: “*Who am I?*”. Such steadfast abidance in the Self -- in *Brahman* -- is termed as Self-Realisation. ”



Nannagaru on ‘Gurupurnima’ Day



“.... He would hold both my cheeks in his two hands”

NANNAGARU AND ME

Even during Sri Bhagavan's life time, a stranger visiting Sri Ramanasramam, might have mistaken Sri Bhagavan to be a Telugu Saint from Andhra Pradesh. This was because the Ashram was usually filled with many pilgrims, aspirants, and devotees from Andhra Pradesh. The Andhra devotees supported the financial needs of running the Ashram, as well. Their sincere devotion to Sri *Bhagavan* was very deep.

After the *Mahanirvana* of Sri Bhagavan, the Ashram became almost deserted overnight. With visiting pilgrims declining drastically, the Ashram's finances suffered. In 1964, the Ashram journal, 'The Mountain Path', was started with Arthur Osborne as its sole editor and me serving it as its managing editor. Thanks to it, devotees and *sadhaks*, especially from Andhra Pradesh, started visiting the Ashram, as in the olden days!

In due course, as matters turned out, the Ashram management started discouraging groups of visiting devotees, on the basis of non-availability of enough staff to attend on them. There was, thus, a period when devotees, especially from Andhra Pradesh, who were making their regular visits to the Ashram, were bluntly denied permission to stay in the Ashram guest houses. Obviously, the devotees in Andhra Pradesh felt affected and unhappy.

Sri Bhagavan gave me the inner urge to take over the duty of attending on the visiting

pilgrims and their needs, and helping them acquaint themselves with the sacred places inside the big temple, around the town, up on the holy hill and round the sacred Mountain hallowed by the stay of Sri Bhagavan. This was in addition to the various other duties I was entrusted with. Coming to know of the deep distress of the Andhra devotees, I started taking steps to amend the damage done. I started attending on the Andhra devotees with a special touch of hospitality and kindness, and, further, not imposing on them limitations on the length of their stay, etc. It took almost two decades to bring back the confidence of the Andhra devotees!

It was at that period that I came to know of a great Andhra Ramana *bhakta* -- B.V.L.N. Raju. Honestly, my first reaction on hearing his name was a wonder over a person having equal number of initials preceding his name! Apart from this, my first meeting with Nannagaru, is evergreen in my Heart! If I remember right, he was introduced to me by another Andhra devotee whom I knew. B.V.L.N. Raju was unknown to me and the other devotee was known to me! Yet, my whole attention was pivoted *only* on the 'unknown' devotee. I felt a deep spiritual attraction to him, which I truly consider as a guidance from within prompted by Sri Bhagavan. From then on, I began showering special attention not only on him, but also on all Andhra devotees who accompanied him. Also, I started giving importance in the columns of 'The Mountain Path' to the 'Ramana-activities' of B.V.L.N. Raju at Jinnuru and other places in Andhra Pradesh, along with photos of the functions sent to me.

Soon, B.V.L.N. Raju flowered into the most affectionate 'Nannagaru' (respected father)! His public meetings were sometimes attended by up to thirty thousand devotees avidly listening to the message of the Maharshi.

The personal relationship between Nannagaru and me also became closer, stronger, and deeply spiritual. In my private and exclusive meetings with Nannagaru, I started experiencing that I was in the presence of a true Saint! It is obvious that Nannagaru himself revealed to me this spiritual dimension of his - what a great blessing!

Once, Nannagaru invited me to Jinnuru. When I reached Bheemavaram, I was received at the railway station by the devotees and admirers of Nannagaru and taken to a reputed lawyer's residence where my accommodation had been arranged. The next morning, to my surprise, I was received with the playing of *nadhaswaram* and *thavil*, seated in an open car and taken round Jinnuru's main streets like a bridegroom in a marriage function!

When the procession reached his ashram at Jinnuru, Nannagaru received me with tremendous love, affection and joy. He said, "Ganesan! You are the 'bride'. Sri Bhagavan

is your 'bridegroom'! Today, we are performing the marriage - the spiritual marriage - by giving you away as the beloved bride to the divine bridegroom, our supreme *Satguru* Ramana!" Every detail of a marriage ceremony was observed on that day, including Sri Bhagavan tying a *mangalsutra* around my neck, after his putting a ring on one of my fingers! It took me days to come out of that pleasant marriage 'reality'!

Nannagaru thus dislodged me from my arrogance of being a bachelor (*brahmachari*) and transported me to the exalted state of a *grihastha* - married person - by making me the 'wife' (*grihini*) of the one and only *Purna Purusha* - Bhagavan Ramana!

"Oh Ramana! My Loving Lord! Throw Thy garland (about my shoulders) wearing Thyself this one (strung) by me, Ramana ! "



Procession



Reception



Marriage



Nannagaru honouring the 'bride'

'Sri Ramana Kshetram', Jinnuru (on 26-12-1994)

Every year, Nannagaru visited Arunachala at least four times with a large number of devotees accompanying him. When I left the responsibility of taking care of the management of the Ashram, Nannagaru would visit me at my house '*Ananda Ramana*'. When all those whom I took care of, ignored and shunned me, Nannagaru - like a true elder brother - would bring a lot of sweets, fruits and above all, his melting love! He would hold both my cheeks in his two hands, lift my face, lovingly look into my eyes and pour his grace into them, saying, "Ganesan! I remember your kind services to Ramana-devotees - old and new - every day of your life at the Ashram. How much you have gathered and published the precious teachings of Sri Bhagavan in book-form! You have a special place in my Heart!"

Even if the whole world forgets me, these Sages and Saints giving me a little space in their Heart - that is more than enough for me!

What a great blessing!

* * * * *



Nannagaru on 'Deepam' Day



Velpur 'Mouna' Swami, V.Ganesan and Nannagaru

VELPUR ‘*MOUNA*’ SWAMI



Life

I had the great good fortune of meeting Velpur ‘*Mouna*’ Swami because of a fortuitous occurrence. ‘*Ramana Periya Puranam*’ was being read out to ‘*Mouna*’ Swami who subsequently translated the book himself into Telugu and asked his people to print several thousand copies to make available for distribution as ‘*prasad*’. When the printed books were ready, he sent me -- through his close Ashram devotees -- 100 copies of the translated Telugu books and requested me to release it in Arunachala. Those, devotees also invited me and Anu Ma to visit Velpur. I felt a deep urge to meet this ‘Silent’ Swami and felt a connection with him.

I was first received with an elaborate welcoming ceremony by a number of devotees at the entrance of the Ashram. The first portion of the Ashram, by the side of a road, has a ‘Sundara Ramana Auditorium’ and visitors’ dormitory rooms. Further inside is an open area with stretches of cultivated land. This open area almost serves to protect the silence of the inner portion where the ‘Dhyana Hall’ is situated.

I entered the Hall - which is richly surrounded by coconut trees and a ‘*Goshala*’, (cowshed) -- to have *darshan* of ‘*Mouna*’ Swami. I would have walked only three acres but it felt like as if I was leaving the external world and entering into the Inner Cave of ‘Quietude’! At the far end of the Hall, Swami stood up to receive me, with a loving warmth in his eyes. Though the large 50x30 foot hall was packed full with the enthusiastic devotees, there prevailed a thundering ‘silence’. The walls were adorned with large portraits of Sri Bhagavan. In the Hall, on the western side, Swami was seated on a six inches raised concrete platform, on which during the daytime he sits and sleeps a few hours in the night.

He is ever surrounded by devotees - day and night - denying any form of privacy for this extraordinarily simple Swami wearing only a loincloth !

Behind where he sits and a little above his head are prominently visible the sacred feet of Sri Bhagavan's very large portrait in a standing pose. There is also a small board requesting visitors not to put questions or doubts to Swami which pertain to one's worldly concerns; and that, spiritual doubts or questions alone should be asked. Despite this, if people question Swami on their worldly troubles, he smilingly turns round, raises his hand and reverentially points to the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan and gestures to indicate that 'Sri Bhagavan is Blessing' or 'Sri Bhagavan's Blessings' are fully on them. Swami never owns any form of credit for things happening in and around him; thus specifically indicating that everything is Sri Bhagavan's Grace alone!

Noticing this special trait of Swami, I was instantly reminded of all the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan who would spontaneously respond in similar situations, by saying, "It is all Sri Bhagavan's Grace. All prostrations and devotion should be directed only to Sri Bhagavan, who alone deserves adoration, surrender and dedication" ! What a joy to be in the presence of such nobility of Old Devotees inundating this '*Mouna*' Swami ! I truly felt 'at home' in his proximity !

Around him, there are always four or five chalk slates, which could fit in a couple of sentences alone. Since he remains in *mouna*, there is silence in the Hall and if anyone has a question or doubt, the slate is handed over so that it can be written and given to Swami. Swami then turns the slate around, gives an answer in Telugu, mostly quoting Sri Bhagavan's words. Most of the devotees take a picture with their cell phone of Swami's written reply, wipe the slate clean -- thereby also erasing their own doubts or concerns -- and return the slate.

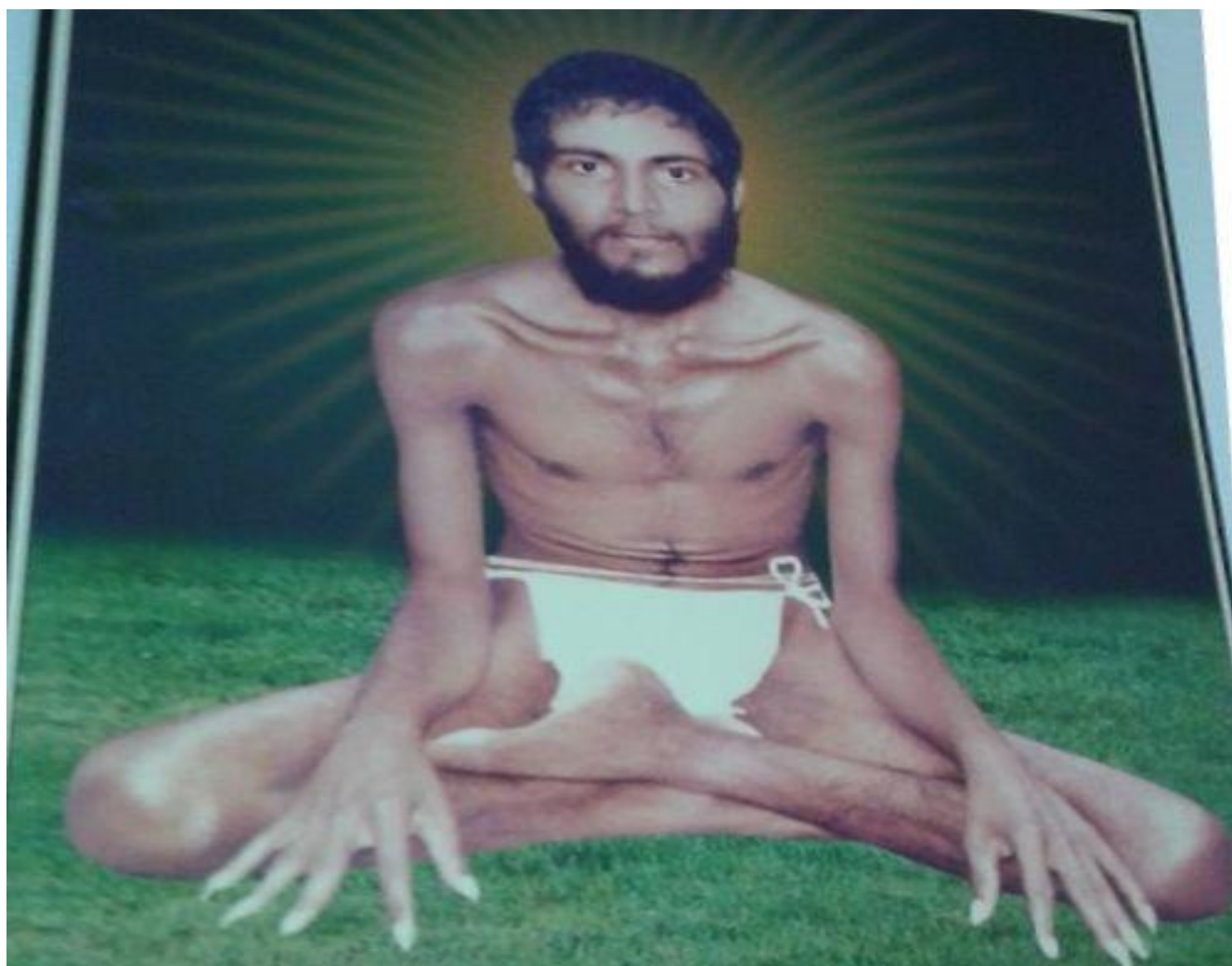
There is no fatigue or tiredness in his face. Instead, his smiling countenance constantly shines with love and benevolence.

When devotees take leave of Swami, as '*prasad*' he gives them, Sri Bhagavan's books in Telugu. To his right side and by the side of the portrait of Sri Bhagavan, there is a built-in book-shelf from which he reaches out for a book according to the need of that *sadhaka*. His close devotees say that Swami never gives the same book to the same person, again !

He signalled through gestures to bring tender coconut water and requested us to drink it. All the devotees were singing in chorus, the Telugu version of Sri Bhagavan's

'Marital Garland of Letters' ('Aksharamana Malai'). When the singing was over, he indicated to us to have lunch, got up and followed us. In a small room adjacent to the kitchen and dining hall, we were seated. Swami came and sat along with us. We were all served lunch on banana leaves. Swami himself received small quantities of every item specially cooked for us on that day; mixed them all together and ate it, majestically. He focused his pointed attention on the visitors seated and prodded everyone of them to eat more and more -- an outpouring of Swami's love expressed in generosity reminded me of the gracious hospitality always shown to the devotees by Sri Bhagavan.

Since many devotees had gathered that day, he instructed me to give a talk on Sri Bhagavan and His Teaching. The talk was held near the Auditorium in a vast open space. Swami remained alone in the 'Dhyana Hall' itself.



Earliest Photo of Velpur 'Mouna' Swami

On my request, the next morning, Swami made arrangements to take us to River Godavari and have a sacred dip in the river. This year is sacred for every one to take bath in Godavari, as they observe the whole year as '*Kumbhamela*' celebration. Swami had planned this morning trip in such a way, our breakfast was served on the bank of the River after taking bath in it. We were pleasantly surprised to notice that not even a minor detail in expressing his hospitality escapes Swami's attention!

* * * * *

The daily routine for Swami starts at 2 o'clock in the morning. He steps out of the Hall to wash himself, comes in and gets immersed in meditation, with closed eyes. All the other Ashramites -- ten to fifteen devotees -- also get up, roll up their mats, and start meditating. The first ones who get up at around 4 or 5 a.m., are the ones who work in the '*Goshala*'. The next batch of devotees who leave the Hall at 5 o'clock are the ones who prepare the breakfast. By then, some more people from the surrounding join in the meditation. By 10 o'clock the Hall is filled with devotees. All the while, Swami is seated like a living statue deeply immersed within, in Bliss. Even if mosquitoes and flies disturb him, there is not a twitch on his skin!

At 11 o'clock, Seethamma an old lady dressed in a white *saree*, sits in front of him. With coconut oil, mixed with camphor, she rubs his limbs to get him back to body-consciousness. When that fails, she takes a big block of camphor, lights it and waves it in front of Swami's face. The warmth of the burning camphor makes him to come back to body-consciousness. Swami's face glows with a divine lustre and he smiles graciously with his eyes. [Seethamma is the fortunate lady who has been serving Swami from 1985; is the lady who is an eye-witness to Swami's "Death Experience".]

Attending on all devotees in the same seated position - reading their questions and answering them by writing; giving them *prasad* of books, smiling a bit more widely at children and giving them candies and chocolates --- goes on for another one to one and half hours. At around 12.30, without even uncrossing his legs from *sukhasana*, he shoots up himself to a straight standing posture without the need of any form of support - an extraordinary *yogic* feat, indeed !

He then proceeds to lunch -- the first meal of his day! He mixes up every form of food -- vegetables, *chappati*, *rasam*, buttermilk and desserts -- into a semi-solid liquid and drinks

it up. After a little resting period, from 2 p.m. onwards he works in the field -- plucking out weeds or helping in the construction of building or cutting grass for the cows or binding the books that are meant for distribution.

This remarkable *Karma Yogi* is surrounded by at least fifteen devotees from all walks of life , taking out weeds or carrying bricks and cement concrete mixture !! The wood he has cut for cooking are bundled up after they are all measured and sized and are neatly stocked near the fire pit, ready to be used ! Free outdoor cooking takes place for functions in 'Sundara Ramana Auditorium', like marriages etc., -- free service for poor people including medical camps. Everything tidy, in time and with perfection! Wherever Swami moves to serve, devotees move along with him, without a word passing between each other.

When the Sun is down by 6 to 7 p.m., everybody is back for dinner -- after which book-binding goes on until 9 to 10 p.m. !! Then, four to five hours of sleep -- and back to meditation again -- all in Self-attention -- an amazing sight !

Swami does not permit anyone to do any form of writing on his life!

Hence, only what I have seen I have recorded !

* * * * *

With my weak heart condition and advanced age, I could join Swami's early morning meditation only late at 6 a.m. But, on one of the days -- I decided to go at 2 a.m and prepared myself to leave even earlier. Anu Ma accompanied me. We saw away at a distance in the open field, beneath a small single light, a dozen people bending and doing some work and were astonished to see that Swami was in the centre of the activity ! Anu Ma told me that they were cutting and bundling together 'salads' coriander and spinach and piling them up in gunny sacks. We both stood around a corner hiding ourselves so that we were not spotted.

Before ten minutes had passed, I felt a tapping on my shoulders by an attendant of Swami. Swami had sent us a message through him that as mosquitoes would bite us here, we were better off sitting in the 'Dhyana Hall' under the fan! So, while Swami continued working in the field despite the danger of snakes and other nocturnal creatures, he was protecting us from mosquitoes!

Swami's junior in school who used to live across his house, told us that after his tenth grade, Swami started assisting his father in their fields. Even then, Swami would get up (around 2 a.m.) and go to the field to work; he would start returning home when all others would get into the field around 7 a.m. ! They would tease him as having "cat's eyes" ! Swami used to share that even at that age he never knew what darkness was !

We both were wondering whether they were sending the harvested greens so early to the market for sale, since we were earlier told that Swami and his inner circle of devotees lived only on the sale-produce from the field.

We came to know that he never accepts donations towards the maintenance of the Ashram that his father had bequeathed to him. Rice, peanuts and sesame seeds are grown with a lot of care and attention in those fields. Then, they are sold in the market; and their sale--proceeds alone is being used to feed the Ashramites, who numbered around a dozen.



'Mouna' Swami Blessing Ganesan

That day, when Swami was woken up from his meditation, piles of the greens, in small bundles, were spread on gunny sheets, by his side. There were a lot of villagers that day. Swami blessed the devotees by giving each of them bundles of those greens, for them to feed the family members at home ! Both, on Mondays and Fridays, the local people are thus blessed with the harvest of his hard work on the field. Here is one Swami to whom you can give 'nothing'; but, you can take a lot of things -- books, fruits, chocolates, vegetables and spinaches ! More than all these, you continuously get his blessings through his "Glance of Grace", along with his most beautiful

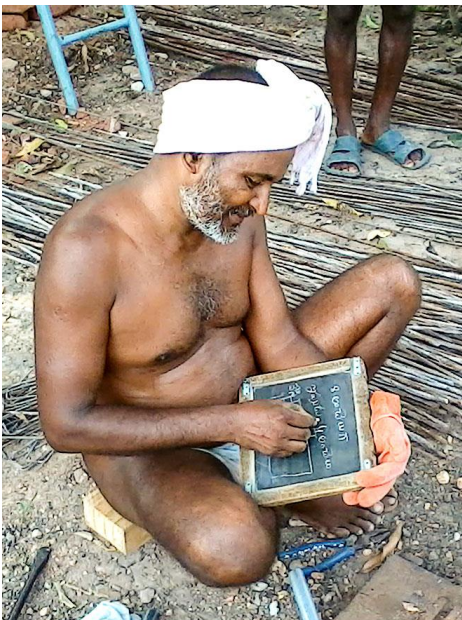
smile !

There are only two functions celebrated on a large scale in the uncultivated portion belonging to the Ashram. One function is in November -- Swami's 'Silence Day' (the day in 1985 when he started observing total silence) and in December--January *Sat--Guru* Ramana's *Jayanthi* (Birthday). A committee formed by his close followers -- who obviously are affluent -- collect the estimated, needed amount, with perfect understanding and full coordination among themselves. More than twenty thousand people are fed ! The outdoor open kitchen is lit using the firewood already cut by Swami ! Swami even raises up, along

with others, the huge tent, after cleaning the open fields !

Those who sincerely want to do some charity to the Ashram -- after long consideration -- are requested to provide Sri Bhagavan's books in Telugu, for free distribution. Also, medicines in large quantities are accepted for free distribution, while the Ashram conducts Free Medical Camps ! One will have to do a lot of penance and patient waiting, to succeed in participating in any one of these two charities. But, no one or nothing can make Swami accept any form of offering to him, personally; except his acceptance of the *namaskars* of the devotees !

I am reminded of the sacred words of Sri Bhagavan : " If one accepts from others, even a grain of salt, one has to eternally be indebted to the giver !" In that sense too, Swami shines as a perfect 'disciple' of Sri Bhagavan !



From 2 p.m until 11 o'clock, Swami is very active in giving finishing touches to all forms of Ashram work, including binding copies of "Ramana Periya Puranam"





Velpur 'Mouna' Swami

The words : “perfect ‘disciple’ of Sri Bhagavan”, reminds me of the serious discussion that used to take place -- in the olden days, in the presence of Sri Bhagavan Himself -- among the devotees present in the Old Hall. "Who is a 'devotee' of Sri Bhagavan ?" and "Who is a 'disciple' of Sri Bhagavan ?" I am told that they finally arrived at the unanimous clarification : " A 'disciple' must be able to follow the life and teaching of the Master, whereas a ‘devotee’ can be an adorer, a *bhakta* of Sri Bhagavan.”

All would readily agree that one could easily be a 'devotee' of Sri Bhagavan, while all the time, one could aspire to be and pray to be a ‘disciple’ of the Maharshi.

I have lived upto eighty years of age to finally have *darshan* of a true "Disciple" of Sri Bhagavan -- Velpur 'Mouna' Swami !

How fortunate we all are - and profusely blessed too ! - that we have Swami in our midst!

* * * * *

Entrance to 'Sri Ramana Nilaya Ashramam', Velpur



TAILPIECE

There was a little child -- aged three years old -- playing in the garden, near the Hall. With love, I tried to attract her attention by making 'bird-noises' ! The child stopped, surprised ! Pointing to the 'Dhyana Hall' with one hand; and, with the other hand, she put her tiny finger on her lips; and, whispered gently, "Sh...h...h...h" !



Ganesan, 'Mouna' Swami, Anuradha -- absorbed in mounam



NOCHUR VENKATARAMAN

(“ *Ramana Charana Tirtha* ”)



Life

Venkataraman was born in Nochur at Kerala, a very traditional village of profound Vedic culture. His father's name was Sundaram Iyer and mother's was Lakshmi Ammal. In his childhood, he had the good fortune of seeing Bhagavan Ramana's powerful photo seated in the *sukhasana* posture in one of his relatives' house. After that he started seeing Sri Bhagavan in his dreams.

At a very young age of nine he lost two paternal uncles and his father in quick succession. Seeing those deaths had a deep impact on the boy's mind about the impermanent nature of the worldly life. During the rituals of cremation ceremony of his father he overheard two elderly women conversing about death. One lady was asking the other about what happened after one's death and where do the dead people go. The elder of the two replied “They cease to exist”. These words had a shocking effect on the boy who was playing next to them. He tried to imagine the state of ‘non-existence’ of oneself. This generated tremendous fear in his heart. His heart was not accepting ‘nothingness’. From his heart he had an intuitional response : “How can existence become non-existent? Here I AM; how can I cease to exist? No! ‘AM-ness’ can never become non-existent”. Though this seemed to be a passing incident, later it had very deep impact on his *Vedanta manana* (spiritual practices). When he was around fourteen years old, he happened to come across the *Bhagavad Gita* which his father used to read every day and started reading it with full devotion. He felt he already knew the *Gita*. There was a very deep fulfillment and peace in that reading. This meditative daily reading of the *Gita* continued for many years. It had a tremendous impact on his life. It revealed to him the message that there is a state of ‘deathlessness’, Bliss, within – the *Atman* – ‘SELF’ – ‘I AM’.

Right from that age he was leading a life of intense contemplation and started frequenting lonely places, the temple of the Divine Mother, Santhi Durga or the jungle surrounding, the Sankara pond and spent most of his time meditating and contemplating on the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, yet not leaving that silent village. Life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda had a very deep impact on his life during that period. Often he disappeared from his home. Many times his relatives traced him to Ramakrishna Ashram at Trissur and forcefully took him home. He spent much of his time in the company of monks at the Ramakrishna Ashram. They loved him as one among them. He came to know the various facets of *spiritual life* from them. He read all the Ramakrishna literature. He also had intimate contacts with many evolved *sadhus* of that order. This gave him the perfect background for his character-building. Such isolation and not leading a normal life of a youth, evoked serious doubts in others about the mental stability of the young boy.

One day at home, he was sitting on a chair with a book in one hand, and a cup of milk in the other. Suddenly he tumbled down from the chair. His mother and family members rushed to see what happened to him. They were distraught to find no sign of life in his body. Mother took the head of her son, placing it on her lap and started weeping. People gathered around the body. After the passage of a few minutes of worry and anxiety, suddenly, life appeared to come back to the body; and, he woke up as if waking up from sleep! That, however caused a deep fear in the mother's heart. Despite her repeated requests, he could not recollect or tell what had happened, except affirming that it was perhaps a remarkable '*Spiritual experience*'!

It was at that time, a great *tapasvi* – (an embodiment of austerity) came to Nochur from Calcutta. He, although elder by forty years, became a full time companion of Venkataraman. This Swami became the instrument of the Lord through whom Venkataraman was being protected, moulded and made to perform the various forms of spiritual practices in his youth. Those practices made the body a fit instrument to absorb the deep spiritual experiences, later on. This Saint helped the too innocent a boy to adjust himself to outer life, making Venkataraman lead a balanced normal life in the family later on, without allowing him to take to the path of external *sannyasa*.

Let us listen to his own words on the greatest turning point in his life :

“I used to spend half the day in the temple of Shanthi Durga. Hours used to melt into the joy of ‘inner silence’ and ‘inner peace’. Those were the rainy days of '*Bhakti*' and the spring of '*Jnana*'. Sometime in those days when I was meditating very early in the morning, about 3 am – sitting in front of the fire, chanting '*Siva Panchakshara*'



Nochur 'Ramana'

into which I was initiated by the Lord in a dream - I always felt the presence of 'fire' as a great help for invoking the Inner Fire of the Self. At that time, suddenly a veil was lifted from the brain and there was a clear perception of a state similar to 'deep sleep in the waking state', true depth of Deep Sleep! It cannot be put into better words.

“Actually I saw or I merged in the absolute release of deep sleep like state while wide awake in that pre-dawn hour. *Sushupti* (Deep Sleep) revealed itself not as a dull state but as the substratum where the Self shines forth bodiless, mindless, egoless...as the profound peace of *Samadhi*. When I came out of that *Samadhi* state, there was a clear insight of the individuality, the 'I', emerging from the abysmal depth of my being which was stillness and peace. It was as if I was seeing my own birth from my own womb. The inner Witness, Awareness, was watching the 'I' - emerging and becoming the personality. The very next day, the stream of Grace entered, *i.e.*, I got Bhagavan Sri Ramana's biography and 'Who am I' in Malayalam. Those two books confirmed and verbalised the route taken by the Inner force on the day before. Thus, only after giving the clear glimpse of the "*Ramana Way*", Sri Bhagavan appeared to me as *Satguru*. 'The fruit comes first and then the flowers', says Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

“Although I had this 'Inner Experience', I was yet to come under the shade of Sri Bhagavan's Motherly Love and Compassion, in his solid presence at Sri Ramanasramam. There was still a deep urge for a very strong anchorage. I was just in my teens – not at all interested in seeking a job or earning money. It is true that the magnetic Power of Sri Bhagavan's Grace was operating as the undercurrent. One of my co-spiritual-seeker friends who was like an elder brother to me, came to my house and firmly said , 'Come with me to Arunachala'. 'I do not have any money with me', was my reply. 'Who asked you for money? I am taking you with me' he said. He almost lifted me and put me on his motorcycle and drove towards the Bus Station. After 12 hours of tedious bus journey we reached Tiruvannamalai. By that time I was almost exhausted. 'Why are we here with so much effort?' was my inner question. We were not even aware that, that day was the most sacred Maha Sivaratri evening! Somewhere near Pali Tirtham, near the Ashram, we got down from the bus. Arunachala, unlike now, was not green but the majesty that unveiled before the eyes ! The irresistible pull of something very deep was undeniable.

“We entered the Ashram which was not at all crowded even on that sacred day. As we had not informed the Ashram about our arrival, rooms were not available. Since we were coming from Palakkad, a devotee took us directly to Kunju Swami. We prostrated to that very elderly *Sadhu* who looked like a delightful child! Swami graciously enquired about us and narrated some incidents in Sri Bhagavan's life. After that, Swami asked a person in the office to accommodate us. So we were allotted the thatched shed in front of Sri Bhagavan's

Samadhi. We kept our bags there and went to Sri Bhagavan's *sannidhi*. The *parayana* was going on. It was the sacred twilight hour of *Maha Sivaratri*. I entered Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall and stood gazing at the *Sannidhi*, leaning on the left side wall. Some deep 'innering' process was activated, inwardly. A kind of 'swallowing' was taking place. The body started shaking and I almost swooned! Meanwhile my friend who was standing behind me held me in his hands and took me to the nearby room. The mouth was repeating some formerly initiated *mantra*. But inwardly the current of 'I' 'I' was very clearly active. A deep process of inner merging was taking place. The mind was only a stream of energy. It was not made of 'thoughts'. It was like a fast running rivulet disappearing into a bottomless source !



Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine

At night a devotee took us for *Giripradakshina*. He himself assisted us to visit Skandasramam and Virupaksha cave. But, all these movements were only on the surface. Deep within me, Arunachala Ramana was reigning Supreme. After that there was no more search for an external *Guru* or God. Many asked me whether I had seen Sri Bhagavan. My response was "Yes, I have seen Him more intimately than anything that could be perceived with my senses." Actually it is He who saw me and swallowed me, not I ! Only He exists!

“During these twenty five years after that visit, many elderly devotees of Sri Bhagavan like Kanakamma and Ganesanna had poured their love and compassion on me. Truly, some of the elders took care of me like their own child. Only through them the sweetness of Sri Bhagavan’s magnanimity and His divine presence became a Reality to me. In them I found that *Guru Bhakti* transcending even the urge for Self-Realisation. Madhusudhana Saraswati says, ‘*Bhakti* after *Jnana* is hundred times sweeter! ’ ”

The Inner Experience, he was blessed with by Arunachala Ramana , began like a spark which later on became a steady ‘Flame of Wisdom’, through constant contemplation and meditation, all through the years. For three and a half years he spent in studies and *tapas* at Kaladi, the birth place of Adi Sankaracharya. During that facet of his life on the banks of River Poorna, all the fundamental scriptures of Vedanta, like *Prasthanatraya Bhashyas* and Bhagavan Ramana’s “Collected Works” were studied and well assimilated by him with the ‘*insight born of Atmanubhuti*’. Many verses in Sanskrit poured forth. Later all his Sanskrit works were published as ‘Anandamakarandam’. Although at Kaladi he was living alone and aloof from the society, a few rare matured souls recognised the spiritual treasure hidden within the blossoming young boy.

In 1993, during Ramana *Jayanthi*, Venkataraman went to Palakkad ‘Vijnana Ramaneeyam Ashram’ to attend a *sat sangh* there. But, as destiny would have it, the speaker of the day did not turn up and Venkataraman was made to speak. The devotees there were thrilled to listen and see a young boy speak for the first time in his life. A renowned professor of Sanskrit who after listening, said “Today we witnessed the coming of a new *Acharya*”. That was the first talk and the subject was ‘*Atma Vichara* and Bhagavan Ramana’. It was like a downpour of *Bhakti* and *Jnana*. Those who had listened to that first talk of his, twenty three years ago, continue listening to him with the same thrill ! One of them affirmed that the first talk was the same as it is now. No change or gradation other than in the age of the body!

Kanakamma, a direct devotee of Sri Bhagavan, learnt Sri Bhagavan’s ‘works’ directly from the great saint-poet Muruganar. We know that she was instrumental in giving us the treasure that we have today ‘*The Complete Works of Bhagavan with Commentary*’. She used to visit Chennai from Tiruvannamalai for her health checkup. During one such trip, she came to ‘Narada Gana Sabha’ for Venkataraman’s talks on ‘*Ulladu Naarpadu*’. Let us

hear the words from Seshadri of Palakkad -- a devotee of Sri Bhagavan -- who was a witness to an incident that happened between Kanakamma and Venkataraman : “Every day, I was in charge of bringing her to the hall by car. After hearing it for all the seven days, she said to Venkataraman ‘Bhagavan speaks through you’. She asked him to come to her place in Tiruvannamalai (behind ‘Manakkula Vinayagar’ Temple). She made him sit in the same place where Muruganar sat and taught her Sri Bhagavan’s “***Collected Works***” and asked him to speak on ‘*Ulladu Naarpadu Anubandham*’ for three days. Upon completion, she said, ‘Bhagavan made me, a person who does not know Tamil, to write the commentary in Tamil on his ‘*Collected Works*’. Now, Bhagavan has made you, a person who has not learnt Tamil, to speak about his ‘*Works*’ in Tamil ! Venkataraman replied, with deep reverence, “Amma, It is from you we got to understand the ‘*Works*’ of Sri Bhagavan.” Kanakamma said instantly, “ But you are the real wonder-(*adhisayam*)- of Sri Bhagavan! ” I who was standing behind them said to him ‘Anna! This is Sri Bhagavan’s stamp on you, the greatest recognition !’ Two months later, that Kanakamma dropped her body right in front of Sri Bhagavan’s *sannidhi* on the sacred day of Sri Bhagavan’s *Jayanthi*. So, this event turned out to be the last meeting between the two.”

Now, Nochur Venkataraman is a well recognised *Acharya* of *Vedanta*. His talks on ‘*Srimad Bhagavatam*’ are a spiritual feast to the yearning devotees. He has composed many texts on *Jnana* and *Bhakti*, in Sanskrit, Malayalam, Tamil and English. His book on Adi Sankara’s life and teachings – ‘*Atmatirtham*’ – has already become a spiritual classic. His commentary on ‘*Ulladu Naarpadu*’ known as ‘*Swatmasukhi*’ in Tamil, English and Malayalam and Bhagavan Ramana’s life in Malayalam are published by Sri Ramanasramam. Great traditional *Acharyas* consider his renditions as most lucid, simple and yet true to the ancient lore of *Upanishadic* Wisdom and scholars consider his commentaries on various *Vedantic* works profound, filled with deep insights, experiential wisdom and authenticity. His talks in Tamil, Malayalam and English are recorded and are inspiring innumerable devotees all the world over. Many have had profound spiritual transformation, just by listening to him once.

May Sri Bhagavan continue to shower His Grace and Blessings on ‘Nochur’ Venkataraman and every member of his family !

THE GREAT TEACHER

The great Teacher who was none other than God
Who walked the earth declared to me “You are *Brahman*”.
Then and there I ceased to exist as a person.
He, the impersonal being, blazes forth as ‘I’-‘I’.
An awakening into the timeless, an awakening into the Infinity
An awakening which is but a rediscovery of the
Primordial teaching in the depth of one’s Awareness.
This vision of the Master filled the heart with gratefulness.
Tears rolled on and on expressing the inner fulfillment.
What else can be given in return to the Omnipotent Being
Who is solidified Nectarine Ocean of Compassion !

- ‘Ramana Charana Tirtha’



Nochur ‘Ramana’



Nochur 'Ramana' celebrating Ganesan's completion of 80th birthday ritually; and, pouring holy water on him at Kolwan, near Pune, on Nov.6, 2016 (Anuradha's son Dr.Sankar took very active part)

“RAMANA AND ME”

The very first time I saw a bright and brilliant youth walking in a state of ‘not himself’, my heart said : “Here comes a rare being who has come to keep Sri Bhagavan’s teaching alive!” From that moment, I addressed him affectionately as Nochur “*Ramana*”. Later, I came to know that his name is ‘Venkataraman’. People at his home and also at Ashram called him as ‘Anand’. But for me he remains and will ever remain as my dear ‘*Ramana*’.

When I look back, I become fully aware that the bond created between the two of us is not merely a human relationship, but something over and above and beyond that. In those days he looked much younger than his age and we considered him only like a child. Even in those days I saw the flame in him and remember, at that time he was not an ‘*Acharya*’ of *Vedanta* or *Srimad Bhagavatam* but only a devotee of Bhagavan Ramana coming to me to spend his time in divine inundation! When I spoke very highly of him then, many reprimanded me for spoiling a young boy by flattery. My Inner Voice was my sole guide in this recognition. The future proved the infallibility of that.



Narada Gana Sabha : “The hall was full in the morning to listen to Sri Bhagavan’s ‘WHO AM I ?’ in the purest form !”

Now after so many years, Friends! Look at ‘Ramana’, has not Sri Bhagavan made my words come true! Many times I have watched and enjoyed how the audience go into ecstasy when they listen to him. Once I went to his talks at ‘Narada Gana Sabha’, Chennai. The evening talk was on *Srimad Bhagavatham*. The huge hall, was overflowing with enthusiastic spiritual seekers. But I was curious about the morning talk as it was on Sri Bhagavan’s ‘Who am I ?’. Ramana has the traditional method of speaking on *Jnana* in the morning and on *Bhakthi* in the evening.

The next morning by sharp seven we were there. The talk started as usual and I was absorbed in the profound presence of the *sat sangh*. My attention was solely on my ‘Ramana’ only and I was sitting in the front row next to Prof. Anantharaman who was the organiser of the *sat sangh*. When the talk was over it, was like the end of a ‘rain of great Peace’. Anantharaman whispered in my ear “Anna! Please turn back and have a look.” I turned and looked, and lo! A thrill passed through my body. The hall was full in the morning to listen to Sri Bhagavan’s ‘WHO AM I ?’ in the purest form!

Suddenly I remembered what Muruganar told me in an ecstatic state. “Ganesa! The day will come when the whole World will listen to our Bhagavan’s teaching.” I thanked Anantharaman for making me see this divine splendour. After that, I told him “See! Like the

rising Sun in the eastern horizon, Nochur 'Ramana' has arisen to keep the flame of Sri Bhagavan's teaching alive". I gave a true sigh of delight!

Many times I had been with Nochur 'Ramana' to his camps on the banks of Ganga at Haridwar. There, I was also made to speak on my association with Saints. Those *sat sanghs* were really enthralling to me. The quality of devotees who came to those *sat sanghs* inspired me very much to share what I have on Sri Bhagavan's life and on the life of Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan.

Whenever Nochur 'Ramana's' devout wife, Hema, who is also like a child to me, or the Scientist, Dr.Viswanathan, who is like a shadow of Nochur 'Ramana', or those who are very closely associated with him -- Murali Sambasankaran, Sridhar, Rangaswami Deekshidar, Chandramouli ,Vidyashankar come to meet me, I repeatedly tell them only one thing – "Look after 'Ramana' well. He is our '*Treasure*' " !



(l to r) Vaidhyanatha Deekshidar, Sridhar, Rangaswami Deekshidar, Nochur Ramana, Anuradha, Vidyashankar, Ganesan, Dr. Viswanathan (photo taken in front of the huge 'Boabab' tree trunk at Rajapalayam)



“My life of eighty years has been filled with rich spiritual experiences”

TAILPIECE

My life of eighty years has been filled with rich spiritual experiences. Despite episodes of turmoil in my external life, I have been constantly inwardly blessed, helped, advised, guided, and sometimes scolded, by Saints who played roles of fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, teachers, mentors and friends to me. For this, I am eternally grateful to each one of them.

Mataji Krishna Bai moulded my spiritual life -- my ‘journey within’ -- and matured it through the great *Siddha Purusha*, Yogi Ramsuratkumar! Along the path, several Saints continually moulded and blessed me making my life, thus far, a beautiful experience.

It seems now to me, that at the dusk of my life, the Great Master **BHAGAVAN RAMANA** has entrusted me to a ‘Glorious Son’ who attends to this ‘tottering’ old parent with dedication, love and devotion!

Despite all those years of service to Sri Ramanasramam - collecting reminiscences of

Old Devotees, attending to them, bringing out the old manuscripts as books, publishing the Ashram journal: '**The Mountain Path**', maintaining the Ashram correspondence, taking care of visiting pilgrims, and collecting funds for expanding the Ashram - I still had a 'nagging pain' in my Heart.

I was conscious about my limited ability to give talks on Sri Bhagavan's Direct Teaching of "**WHO AM I ?**" in a manner that ordinary people could grasp it and apply it into practice in their lives.

Another lingering concern was that our Ashram should actively follow Sri Bhagavan's specific directive: "**It should be maintained as a Centre for the diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge**"! I am happy to have lived long enough to see my resplendent 'Spiritual Son' Nochur '**RAMANA**', dispersing this Wisdom to the whole World! Thousands have flocked to Sri Bhagavan's path directly as a result of his tireless efforts to spread the teaching.

Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan fondly used to address me and treat me as '**Kuzhandhai Swami**' - 'Child Swami'. The Great Master seems to complete this 'child's' life -- with a 'spiritual son'!

'Life' is truly, very richly rewarding as its "**only purpose is to realise the Self**"!

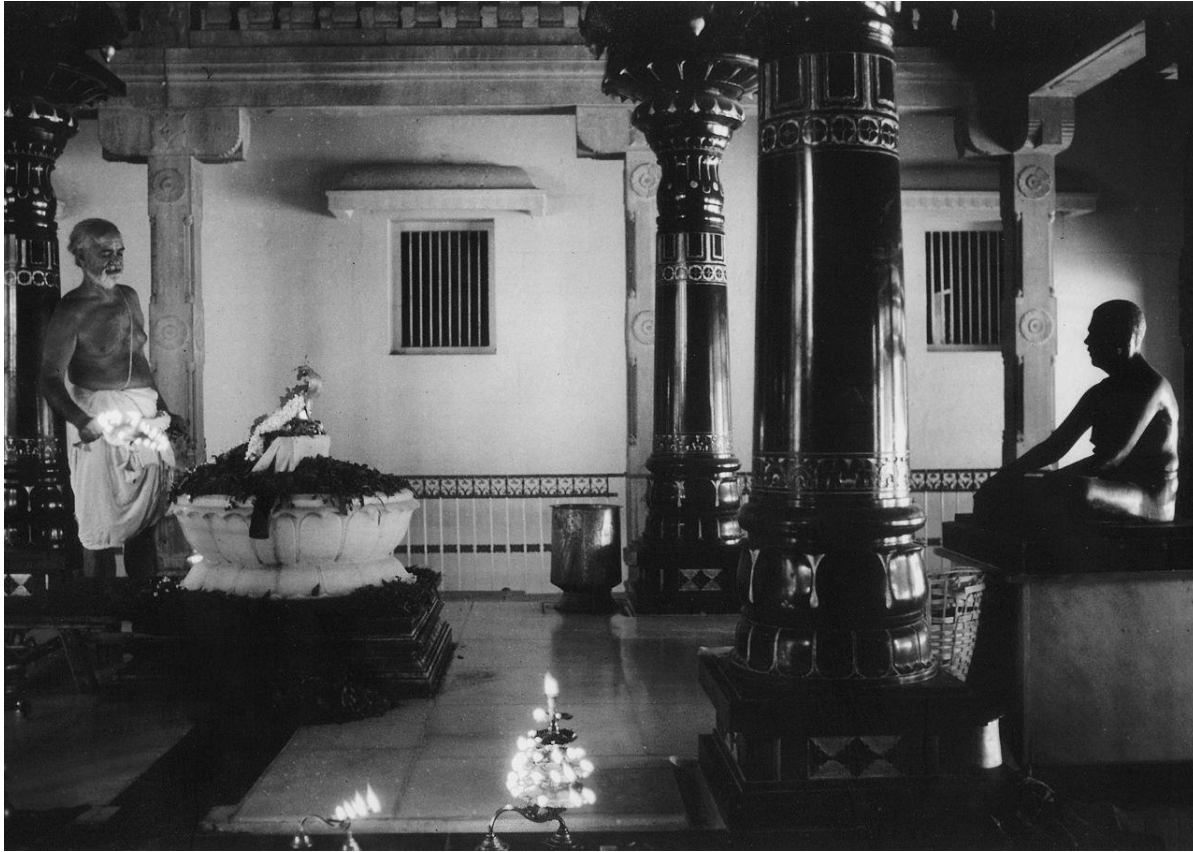
My 'Father' is '**RAMANA**' !

My 'Mother' is '**RAMANA**' !

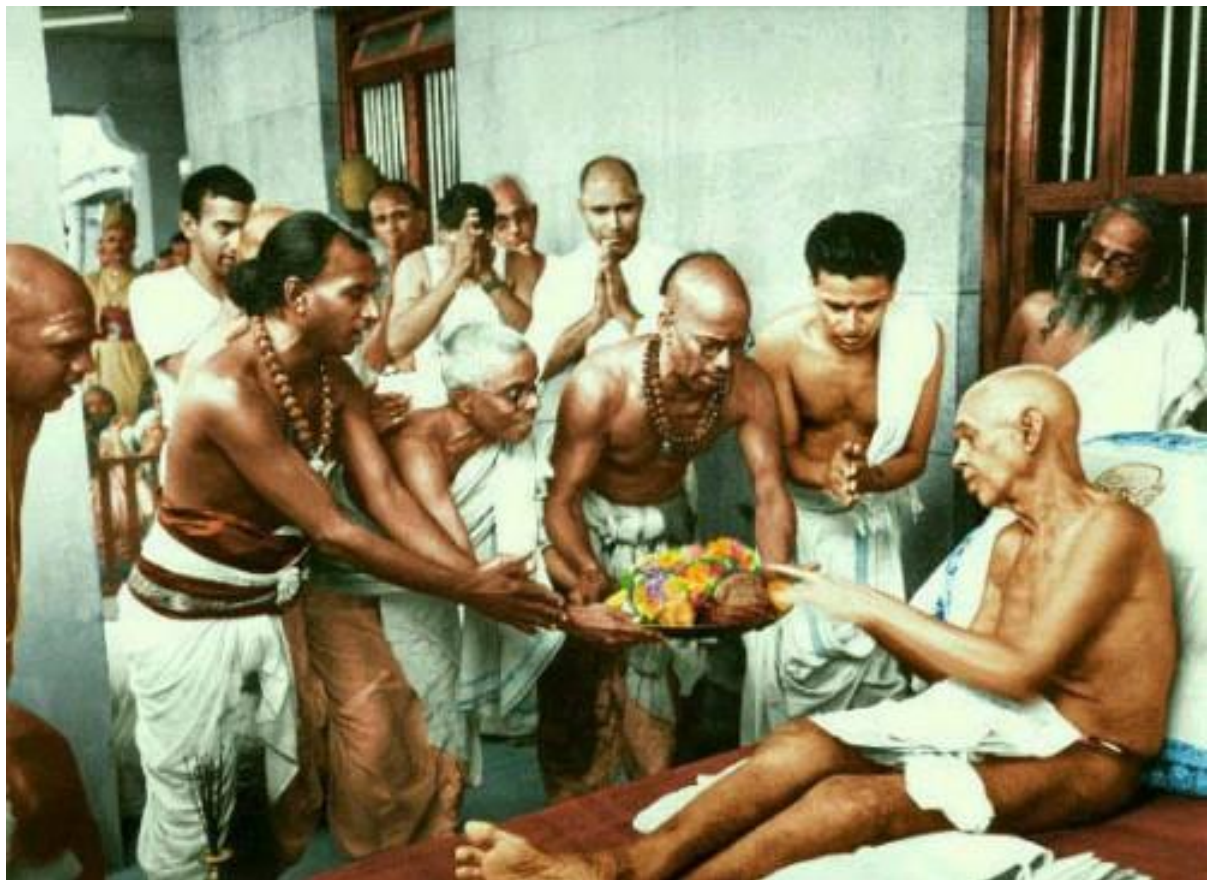
My 'Son' is also '**RAMANA**' !



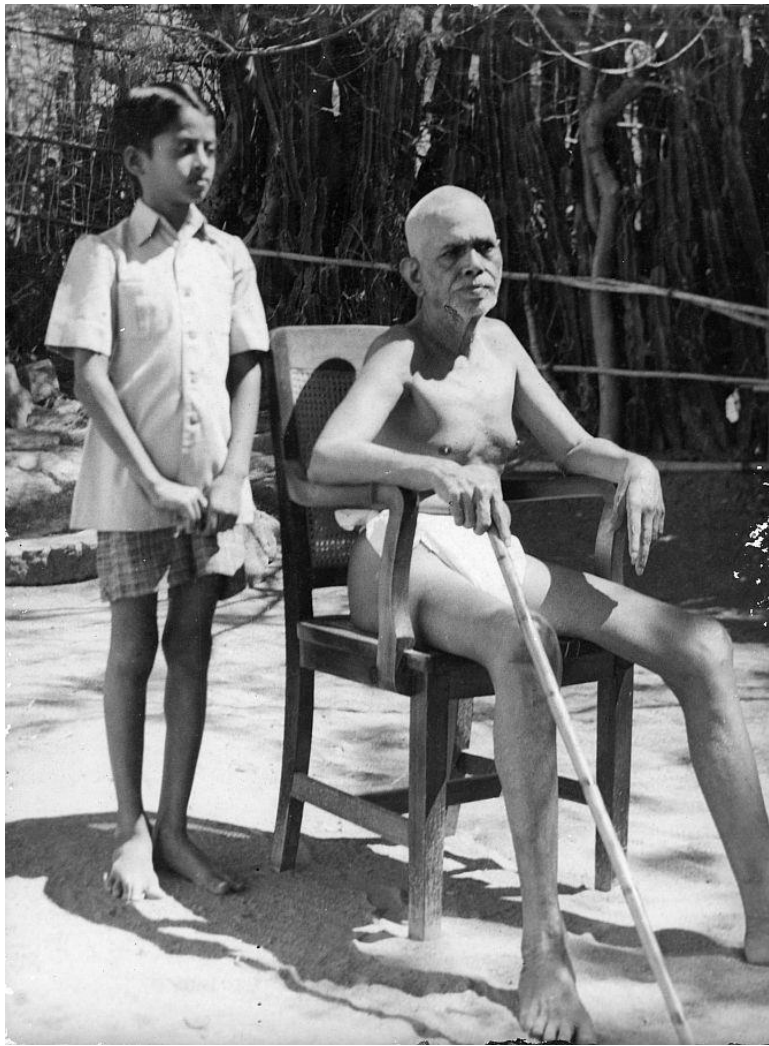
" 'Father' and 'Son' "



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's Samadhi Shrine (Sacred Shrine of Silent Grace)



Blessings from Sri Bhagavan



Ganesan with Sri Bhagavan [behind goshala (cow-shed) - 1945]

Born in 1936, upto the age of 14, V.Ganesan grew up in the presence and proximity of his grand uncle, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. His sacred memory of the Master is rich in its content; and, even at that tender age he could see Sri Ramana as the greatest compassionate human being. On April 14, 1950, the day the Master chose to leave the body, the adolescent Ganesan stood near the entrance to the room where Sri Ramana was lying and was fortunate to see the brilliant flash of Light, which later moved towards the top of the Holy Hill, Arunachala.

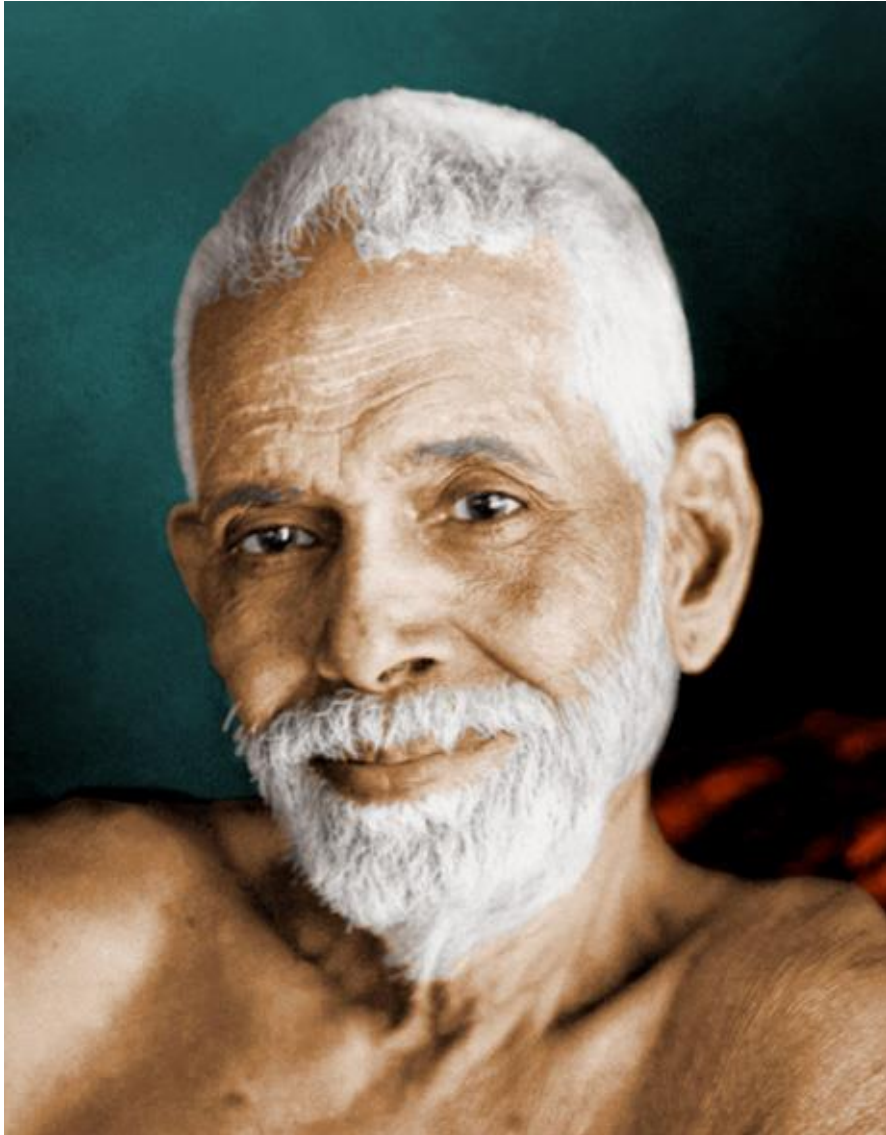
Ganesan obtained a Master's Degree in Philosophy; and, then came to Sri Ramanasramam for good, looking after the Old Devotees of Sri Bhagavan, as his *sadhana* (spiritual practice). In this way, he collected reminiscences of Sri Maharshi never before recorded.

His close contacts with Sages and Saints, including J. Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta Maharaj and Yogi Ramsuratkumar, he says, has deepened and widened his understanding of the essence and true message of the Maharshi. He, however, feels himself to be an insignificant 'dust' at the Holy Feet of Bhagavan Ramana.

For thirty five years, Ganesan was the Manager of Sri Ramanasramam and the Managing Editor of *The Mountain Path*, the ashram's journal. For six years (upto 1994), he was its Chief Editor, as well. All these unique experiences have blessed him with an incredible ability to present the relationship that the Old Devotees had with Sri Bhagavan in his last book, '*Ramana Periya Puranam*'. Ganesan has previously authored *Be the Self*, *Moments Remembered*, *Purushottama Ramana*, *The Direct Teaching of Bhagavan Ramana* and *Drops from the Ocean*. At the commandment and directive of Velpur 'Mouna' Swami, recently Ganesan has written "*Meetings with Sages and Saints*" featuring important details of his spiritual contacts with Sages and Saints, whom he was blessed to meet with.

Supplement to:

“Meetings with Sages and Saints”



“ EPILOGUE ”

The title of this book, ‘Meetings with Sages and Saints’ has apparently raised a baffling question among a few Ramana devotees : “When Sri Bhagavan is Ganesan’s *Satguru*, why did he seek guidance from others that he classifies as saints and sages?”

My humble request is that they should read this book. Its contents will release them from the grip of *ajnana*, *sandheha* and *viparidhajnana* -- ignorance, doubt and wrong knowledge.

In addition to the 25 *Mahatmas* I have shared about in this book, there were many more *Siddha Purushas* who blessed me. As they remain 'nameless' and 'formless' -- in the sense no one knew their names nor were there photos of them -- I felt they could not be contained in the pages of a book !

As an example, I'd like to share the following :

In the 1990's, I started staying in '*Ananda Ramana*' for longer periods of time. When I had to go to the Ashram, it was my practice to stand on the main road and try to hitch a ride. On one such occasion, a stout, middle aged man jumped over the forest fence, came up to me and extended his hand. When I gave him a five rupee note , he declined. Strangely, he only accepted when I gave him a one rupee coin! After this, he ran back, jumped over the fence and disappeared back into the forest.

This happened regularly over the next several months. The surprising thing was that he appeared only when I was troubled by emotions of anger, jealousy, envy and hatred that others had against me. And each time, he would demand just one rupee, nothing more, nothing less.

One day, I was alone on the main road filled with joy and gratitude to Bhagavan for his Grace on me ! On that day, the *Siddha Purusha* came up to me and instead of demanding his usual due, thrust a new one rupee coin into my hand and disappeared back in the forest around the holy hill.

The very next day, Chinnaraj, my Man Friday, whom I treated like my brother, came to me and reported that the '*One Rupee Swami*' was found dead on a rock at the foot of the hill and that people were rushing to see his body which was in a frog like yogic posture !

I felt that the demanding of a rupee from me every time I was troubled, was this *Siddha Purusha's* way of taking over my problems and freeing me to be established in Inner Silence. And his giving me a one rupee coin was his way of confirming my being established in that Inner Peace.

Sri Bhagavan often used to quote from Kaivalya Navaneeta about how it was essential to be firmly established in Truth even after one has grasped it. He used the analogy of putting up a flag post. One has to dig a hole, put the post in it and then cover it with mud. Kaivalya Navaneeta further states that this too is not enough. It illustrates this fact by pointing out how the loose soil around the base of the post has to be repeatedly pounded and pressed until the base of the post can stand firm even in a hurricane !

I had a very good grasp of Bhagavan's direct teaching of Self Enquiry. But, perhaps, my understanding needed strengthening. That is why, I feel, Bhagavan sent me to those 25 Saints and Sages. All of them told me, as if in one voice, "Stay here in Ramanasramam. Don't go anywhere else searching for Truth. Bhagavan is the Truth. Arunachala is your home. The Lord's blessings are fully on you."

Whenever I travelled overseas to share Bhagavan's direct teaching of Self Enquiry, it was at the persistence of two Mahatmas* -- Yogi Ramsuratkumar and Koti Swami. Has not Bhagavan himself revealed that everyone of us and everything that we see is 'Arunachala Swaroopa'?

The four page supplement that follows is meant to share the grandeur of each and every 'Arunachala Swaroopa' that I was blessed to meet and mingle with.

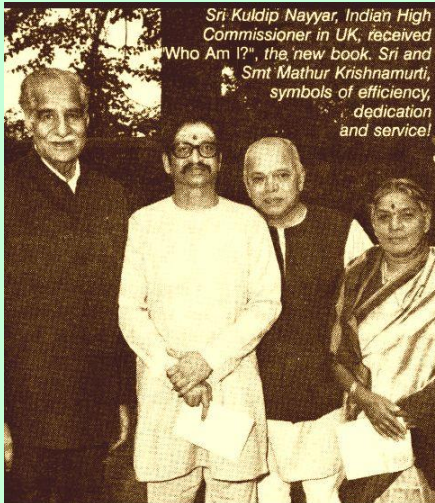
May Sri Bhagavan bless us all !

V.Ganesan



* See pages 90 and 299 for more on these two Mahatmas.

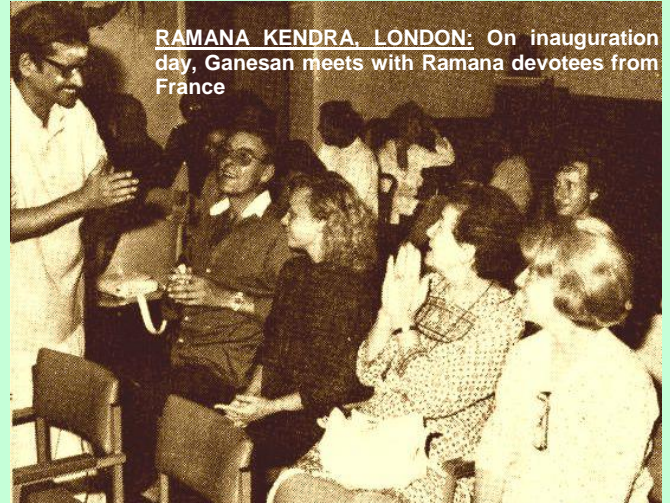
"Travels in Overseas Countries" -- with Grace and Blessings from Saints **1990 -- London, England**



Sri Kuldip Nayyar, Indian High Commissioner in UK, received "Who Am I?", the new book. Sri and Smt Mathur Krishnamurti, symbols of efficiency, dedication and service!

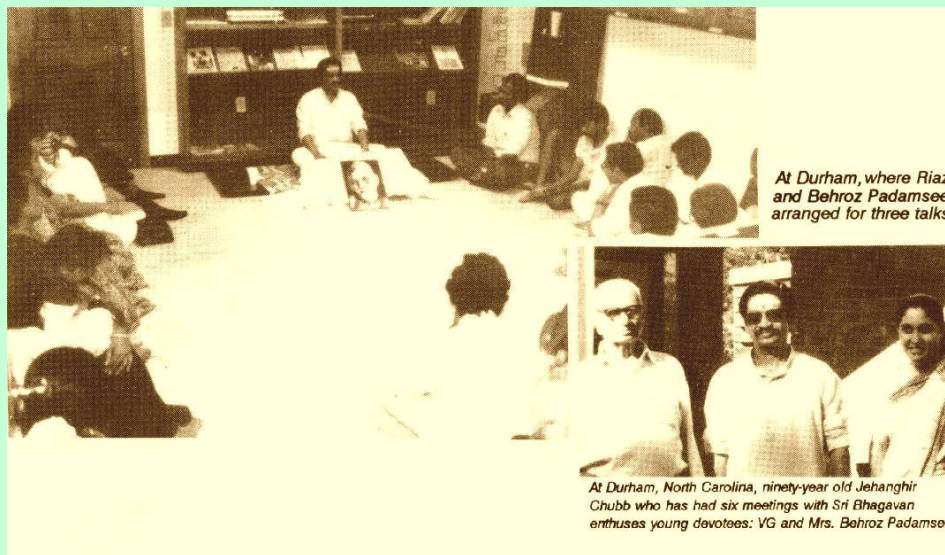


Alan Jacobs and Annie Elkins.



RAMANA KENDRA, LONDON: On inauguration day, Ganesan meets with Ramana devotees from France

Durham. USA



At Durham, where Riaz and Behroz Padamsee arranged for three talks.

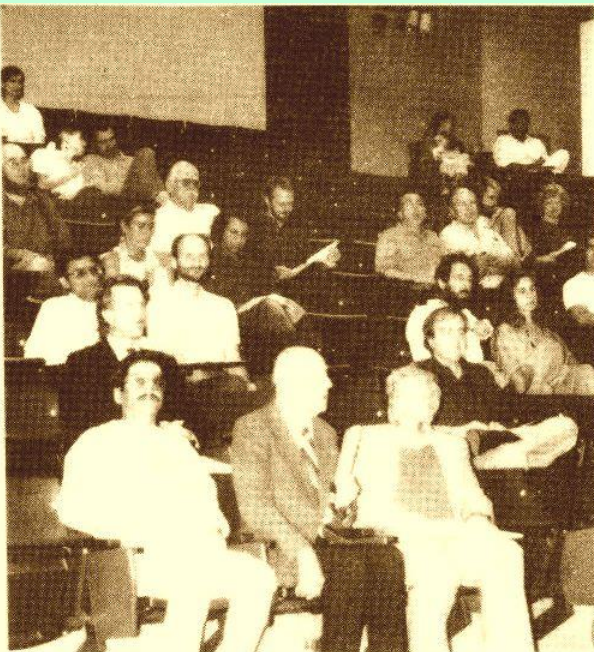
At Durham, North Carolina, ninety-year old Jehanghir Chubb who has had six meetings with Sri Bhagavan enthuses young devotees: VG and Mrs. Behroz Padamsee.



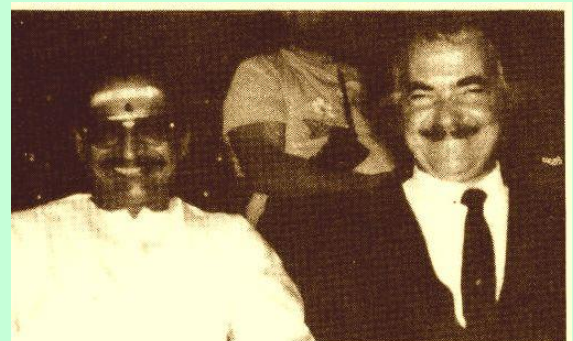
"All the travelling that I had done to share with spiritual aspirants Sri Bhagavan's 'Direct Teaching' -- in Europe, USA, Canada and elsewhere -- was done on Yogi Ramsuratkumar's commandment only."



Matthew Greenblatt, the moderator, with daughter Ramani.



A section of the audience at the University of California program. Over 65 people, many from various parts of the country, attended.

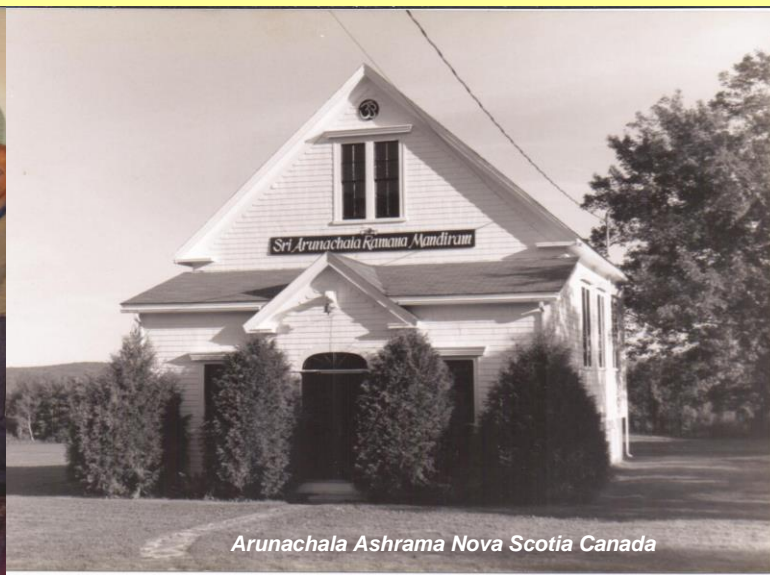


Childhood friends - Ganesan and Adam Osborne - a moment of joy!

"Travels in Overseas Countries" -- with Grace and Blessings from Saints
1991 -- U.S.A



Arunachala Ashrama NewYork



Arunachala Ashrama Nova Scotia Canada

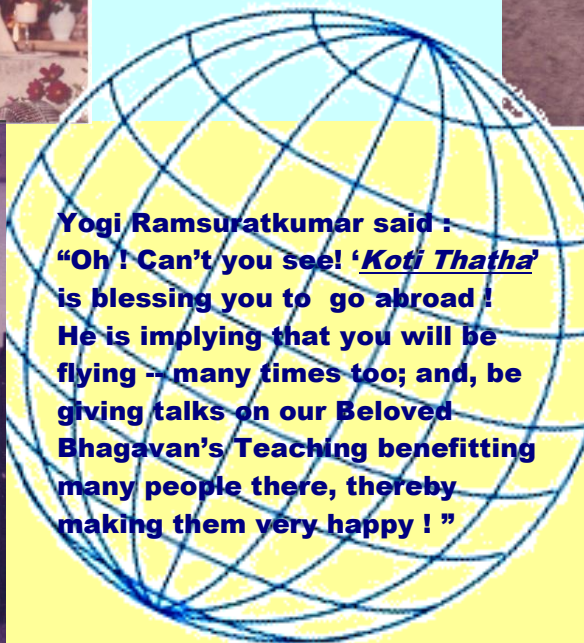


Ganesan addressing his first talk
in AHAM Center, Asheboro, NC, USA

Devotees raptly listening to the talk :
'No Fire, No Food'



Lands at Hamburg Airport and
stands under the protection of
'RAMA' !



Yogi Ramsuratkumar said :
"Oh ! Can't you see! 'Koti Thatha'
is blessing you to go abroad !
He is implying that you will be
flying -- many times too; and, be
giving talks on our Beloved
Bhagavan's Teaching benefitting
many people there, thereby
making them very happy ! "



Along with staunch Ramana devotees
Trudel Elsaesser and Karin Stagemann



at Boston



in Florida

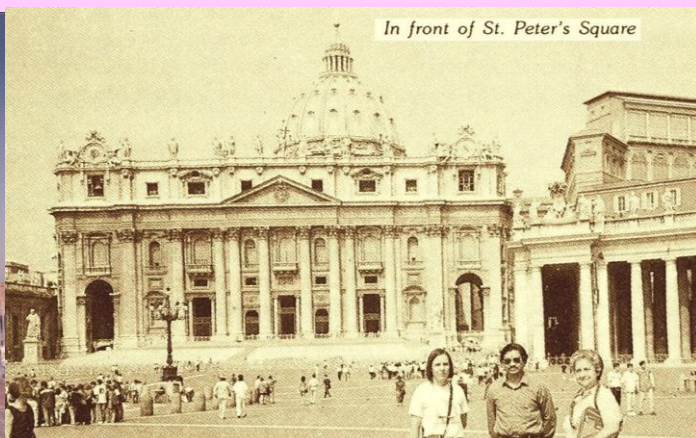


with David Lawrence and Barbara Rose

"Travels in Overseas Countries" -- with Grace and Blessings from Saints **1990-1992 -- Italy and U.S.A**



In front of the famous Dome of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome



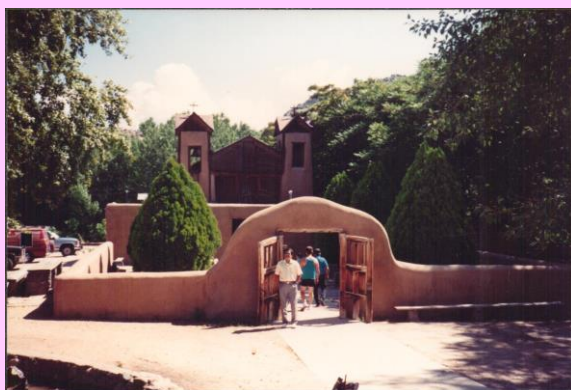
Enthralling the visit along with hosts



The famous Statue of the "chained St. Peter"



Feeling being blessed by the Holy Water from the 'Miracle Well' inside the underground cellar wherein St. Peter was chained and imprisoned



Santa Fe : the Oldest and first Church in U.S.A
Inside the Church



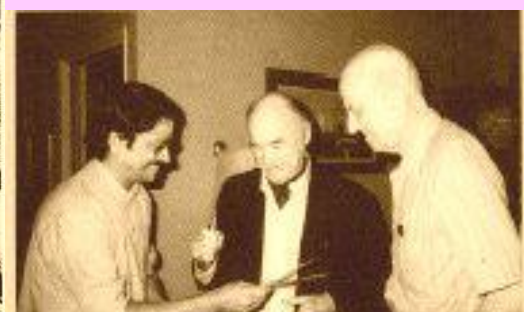
"Suddenly, 'Koti Swami' gave out a big laughter and said : 'Oh! I see 'Koti' (ten million) planes, 'Koti' airplanes ! 'Koti' people ! 'Koti' happiness to all ! ."



A view of the mountain near J. Krishnamurti's cottage, reminiscent of Arunachala

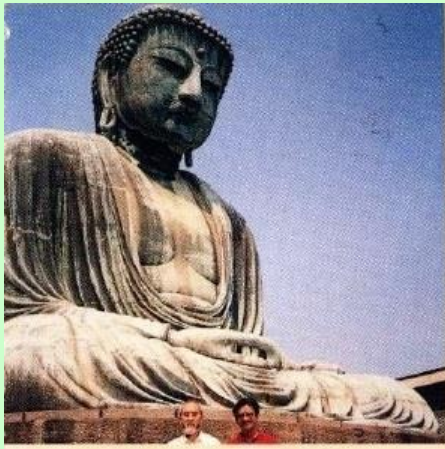


'HOPI' elder, Mr. Thomas Banyacya listens to Ganesan on Sri Bhagavan. Mrs. Carmen seated to his left



SAN DIEGO: with Dr. Alan Anderson and Dr. Robert Powell

"Travels in Overseas Countries" -- with Grace and Blessings from Saints
1992-1994 -- Japan , Hong Kong



NARA, Japan : The biggest bronze statue of BUDDHA



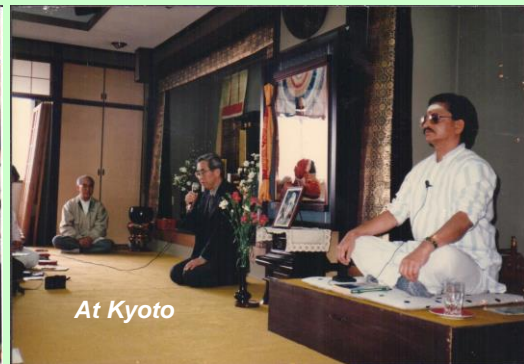
Zen Monastries



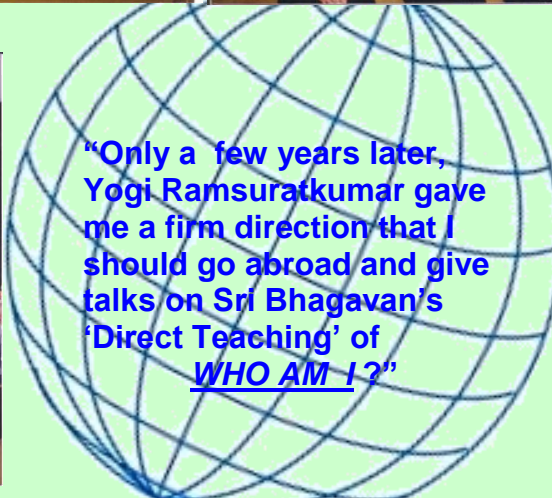
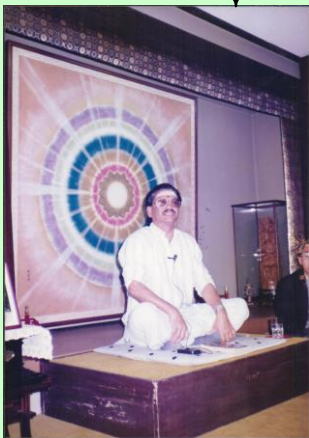
Ganesan, Anuradha along with Prof.Tadashi Yanagida (second from left - standing)



At Kyoto



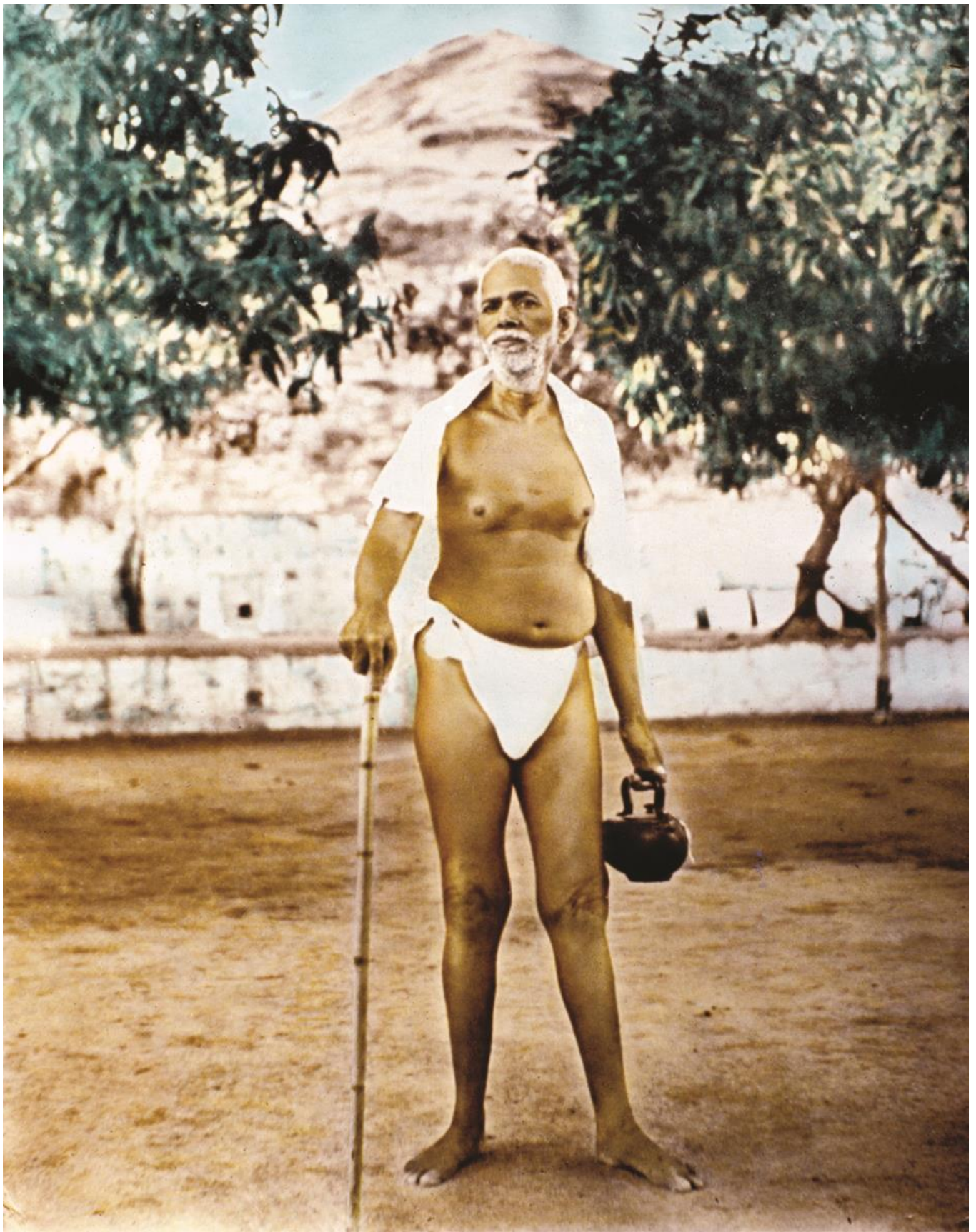
At Kyoto



At Hong Kong



At Shibuya City Hall,Tokyo









Sacred Feet of Sri Bhagavan



AHAM Center: In front of 'Arunachala Auditorium Hall'
[wherein 49 + 12 Talks of the TWO Books were given]



Ganesan takes a summer walk
[Thank You – AHAM Center !]

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Email: arunaham@vsnl.com

AHAM website for downloading '*Meetings With Sages And Saints*'
<http://aham.com/SagesAndSaints>



This is the only original colour photo of Sri Bhagavan taken on a colour film (by a western devotee)